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SHAKESPEARE'S
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
POEMS.

BEING

HIS SONNETS CLEARLY DEVELOPED

WITH

HIS CHARACTER

DRAWN CHIEFLY FROM HIS WORKS.

BY

CHARLES ARMITAGE BROWN.

"With this key, simple as it may appear, every difficulty is unlocked, and we have nothing but pure uninterrupted biography."*—Page 40.*

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TO
WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR, ESQ.

MY DEAR SIR,

To you I first communicated at Florence my explanation of Shakespeare's SONNETS. The interest you felt, and your desire that I should publish the discovery, have induced me, though after a lapse of ten years, to enter on the serious, and, perhaps, unpardonable task, of solving a literary difficulty.

When a silent man once begins to speak, he is sometimes apt to make up for lost time. You will see that I talk of many matters besides the SONNETS; for which the late discoveries of Mr. Collier are partly accountable; but chiefly I have been

incited by an earnest wish to raise the ungracious veil that has so long obscured the fame of our grand poet and philosopher.

The ablest critic must be the kindest ; otherwise I should fear to lay this volume before you, lest you should feel compelled to express an equally public dissent from some parts of my observations.

While writers of seeming novelties gain popularity in spite of a slovenly and vitiated style, let me congratulate you on having enforced the attention of our countrymen by original thought, clothed in pure and expressive English.

May you long continue to delight and instruct us, nursing our best impulses into active virtues !

I remain, ever,

Your sincere friend,

THE AUTHOR.

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INTRODUCTION.

WHATEVER we can glean respecting Shakespeare, such are the common assertions, is scanty and apocryphal. A plausible speculation on his character may, therefore, gain attention, while a well-founded one must be interesting. My title-page, as far as his *Sonnets* are concerned, promises more. Each succeeding biographer has expressed his astonishment that little or no information has been bequeathed to us by his contemporaries and immediate followers; but not one has remarked that the domestic lives of the greatest men of that time, and for a long time after, were alike neglected. Doubtless, or they would have been recorded, the unromantic events of a great man's life were regarded as uninteresting. Memoirs were not then in fashion. An author was permitted to remain concealed as much as he chose: that is, no one spoke of him to the public apart from his works; and if his works explained nothing of his personal character, nothing was said of it. This fashion has long since changed; but we should not reprove our forefathers for neglecting the biography

of any individual, however illustrious; nor should we imagine, from their silence, that such an individual was not held in great fame among them. They could not be aware of our modern taste; and, if they had been, they, as authors, were hardly to be expected to write for readers a century or two in advance. They seem to have considered it enough for the public to form to themselves a general opinion of an author, as a man, from the tenour of his works.

Shakespeare's readers, it is true, distinct from the magic of his genius, see nothing, throughout his works, but love and charity towards all mankind, the vicious alone excepted; and even these last excite our compassion, either in their want of knowledge or of natural capacity, or in the consequences of some overwhelming passion. He never afflicts us by too high, or by too low an estimate of human nature; for either is afflicting. Acting up to his own text, he sees "good in every thing," without shutting his eyes to the evil. "The web of our life," he tells us, "is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipped them not; and our crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our virtues." This constant, undeviating, kind philosophy towards his fellow-creatures, and towards every thing belonging to the great Creator, is so impressed on our minds, that, relying on the honesty of his language, we have indeed more than an opinion, an assurance, that he wrote not from factitious feelings, but from the impulse of goodness. In this view we have his character made out fully and satisfactorily, superadding, as we needs must, those valuable

qualities, the inseparable attendants on so pure a philosophy,—qualities which, happily, are confirmed by the little his contemporaries have accidentally, as it were, said of him.

Yet, with all this, his true lovers cannot, and ought not to be content. In their love they would know all about him; they would see him face to face, hear him speak, be in his companionship, live with him altogether. Wishes are boundless, but, when absurd, they quickly vanish; while, in an humbler and more reasonable strain, we sigh for the discovery of some well-authenticated, genuine anecdotes;—a diary, kept by some Boswell companion, for instance, would be worth a million times its weight in gold. In the absence of so vast a treasure, let us, aided by the previous researches of others, strictly examine into his own writings, and endeavour to elicit something that may throw a light on the circumstances of his life, or his opinions, or his disposition.

At first sight, this task may be condemned as hopeless. Poets, though not essentially dramatic, are rarely to be relied on even when they seemingly profess to describe their own sentiments. They may choose rather to tell the world what they ought to be, than what they are; like Thomson, in his *Seasons*, expatiating on the happiness, the delight, the necessity of rural exercise, swimming, and early rising, calling out,—

“Falsely luxurious ! will not man awake ?”

while he himself was a sluggard in bed, and worse up, a 'willing captive in his own *Castle of Indolence*.

Who could believe, from the *Night Thoughts*, that Young was a flattering, slavish courtier? yet, were his biographers silent, the dedications—for above these hundred years kindly suppressed—give melancholy proof of it. On the other hand, Cowper and Burns, contrasts in all but sincerity, may be brought forward as evidences that it is possible for poets, and poets of a high order, to write nothing in discordance, as far as we are enabled to judge, with their lives. But dramatic writers, however honest they may be, are necessarily less transparent; since they profess to clothe, in language foreign to their own nature, the varied characters brought upon the scene; and the more truly the characters are drawn, unless the poet should, in a single instance, paint from himself, the more dissimilar they must be from himself. This is particularly the case with our great poet, of whom Pope, scarcely with exaggeration, says,—“Throughout his plays, had all the speeches been printed without the very names of the persons, I believe one might have applied them with certainty to every speaker.”

Still, let it be borne in mind, the dramatic writers of Elizabeth's age were not like our tragic writers of the last century. The latter, imitators of the French school, were so utterly of the same stamp, so starched up in the same buckram, and so imbued with the same parts of speech, that one mind, if mind it may be called, might have produced the entire progeny; while the former, free and vigorous, original in thought, and without cold models of expression to mislead them, bore each in himself his own identity; so that an intimate reader may generally distinguish

from each other the works of Shakespeare, Marlow, Ben Jonson, Webster, Decker, Massinger, and Beaumont and Fletcher, without the aid of the title-page.

Distinct as these authors stand, a portion of their several characters may undoubtedly be discovered in their works. I have already mentioned the general opinion we form of Shakespeare's character, on which it is my purpose to dwell; and other points of particular import may be revealed by directing our remarks to the selection or invention of his fables, or of the persons of his dramas, the bias of his mind in the management of them, his recurrence to certain opinions, or to his apparent likings or dislikings; always keeping in view the manners of the age, so as to deduce, if less than conviction, more than a vague idea, and more than we have hitherto entertained respecting him. For myself, in addition to some general deductions, I intend to bring forward internal evidence from his later plays, in proof of his having visited Italy, so as possibly to make the disbelief of his having been there far more difficult than the belief.

But he was not solely a dramatist. He has left us a volume of poems, among which are numerous Sonnets, wholly descriptive of events which had occurred to him, and of his feelings attendant on them. Schlegel, about twenty years ago, directed our particular attention to them, surprised at our neglect, and assured that, by competent diligence, something of Shakespeare's life might be revealed, or, at any rate, be illustrated by them. Since that time few have attempted to unfold their meaning; none with success.

Previously to entering on any part of this subject,

it is necessary to examine the accounts we have received of the early life of our poet. In order to form an estimate of his character, we ought to be acquainted with the situation in which he was placed; if not satisfactorily, still let us be acquainted with it as nearly as possible.

HIS YOUTH IN WARWICKSHIRE.

HE was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, in April, 1564. His father was John Shakespeare. His mother's maiden name was Mary Arden. She possessed a small property in land. William was the eldest son of six children. Rowe, his first biographer, states,—“His family, as appears by the register and public writings relating to the town, were of good figure and fashion there, and are mentioned as gentlemen.” This idle assertion has given rise to much idle research and disquisition. It is certain, John Shakespeare, his father, had been Bailiff of the Town Corporation ; and he was a dealer in wool, or a glover, or both by turns. “Up to the period of 1574,” we are informed by Dr. Drake, “Shakespeare's father might be considered as a man of property, being possessed of two houses and some land, beside personal property ; but he shortly afterwards fell into a state of poverty.” In 1578 the mother's landed property was mortgaged for forty pounds ; and the father, in that same year, was exempted, on account of his necessities, from paying his share of the poor-rate.

Here we have dates and facts whereon to rest ; by which it appears, that, at the age of fourteen, our William Shakespeare was the eldest son of a large and an extremely impoverished family.

It is agreed on all hands, that he was educated at the grammar-school of his native town ; and it is reasonable to believe that he was benefitted there with a foundation for classical study. We are told, indeed, by Aubrey, (no good authority, I acknowledge, besides his being born ten years after the poet's death) that "he understood Latin pretty well ; for he had been, in his younger years, a schoolmaster in the country." Dr. Farmer treats Aubrey's tradition with contempt, arguing, that Shakespeare, having married before he was eighteen, and quitted the country, for London, three years afterwards, had not time to act as schoolmaster. Why not?—there was plenty of time, married or unmarried, before he was one-and-twenty, for the purpose, even if he did quit the country so early. Why should we not imagine he was, at the age of fifteen or sixteen, an assistant in that very grammar-school ? Such an employment of the eldest boy in a grammar-school, of one who has evinced ability, together with a desire of still improving his education, is not, and never could have been, uncommon. A more solid objection to Aubrey's story may be discovered in the improbability of any pecuniary recompense being given to so young an assistant at the school, while the family must have stood in need of his exertions. We certainly know nothing of the employment of his time while he was a lad—nothing on which we can rely ; yet we cannot

doubt, under the circumstances, but that his time was spent profitably.

Taking into consideration the urgent want of bread at home, it is not credible that the eldest son of a numerous family should not employ himself, or be employed, soon after he was fourteen, in earning something towards the maintenance of his brothers and sisters, or, at least, for himself. It is not credible, even if the lad had been unfeeling and worthless ; because, in that case, the father would have justly handed him over to some forced employment, so that he might not continue a burthen on the rest. But tradition has not brought to us a single anecdote of his youth in the country, except that of his having been a deer-stealer ; and that has been amply refuted by Malone, as far as Sir Thomas Lucy's deer were concerned.

An important question, both on its own account, and as it involves others, inevitably suggests itself,—of what nature was his occupation ? It appears to me, that, without straining facts, without injuring probability in the slightest degree, a satisfactory answer can be given ; one, indeed, which has already obtained credence, and which it shall be my endeavour to support.

In the first place, we may reasonably suppose that his occupation was of a more lucrative nature than it could have been in his father's ruined trade, or in any common drudgery. An education at a grammar-school placed him above many of his fellow boys in the town ; for perhaps it is not too much to imagine that not one in ten of the entire population could

read and write ; his father, who had served as bailiff, was not able to write his own name. There is also tolerable proof that the boy had obtained a prosperous situation, in the fact of his having married Anne Hathaway, a farmer's daughter in the neighbourhood, when he was only eighteen. That she had property of her own, at the time of her marriage, is probable ; but it is highly improbable that she possessed enough for herself, her husband, and the children they must naturally have expected. Imprudent youthful marriages are frequent ; but we never find that a youth, who takes a wife without fair hopes of maintaining her and hers, will be remarkable for prudence afterwards ; while Shakespeare was, in all good husbandry, not only superior to his brother poets, but to most men. Unless, therefore, we presume he was different, in all respects, from other human beings, we must come to the conclusion that he was in some way employed, so as to be able to earn a decent livelihood.

Malone first furnished us with a passage from Nashe, though he put no faith in it himself, showing that he had been a lawyer's clerk,—a *noverint* ; so called, from the first word of a Latin deed of those times, equivalent to our modern commencement of *Know all men*, &c. From the internal evidence of his works alone, Chalmers formed an opinion that he had been a lawyer's clerk ; and the first of our critics, in *Imaginary Conversations*, has, in a delightful fiction, treated it as a certainty.

The early life of any one, if his character is to be particularly canvassed, is more important than a series of facts drawn from the history of his manhood. A

youth's employment, voluntary or compelled, is certain of leaving an indelible hue on his nature, however distinct his after pursuits may become. Strongly impressed with this fact, I proceed to explain and corroborate the information afforded us by Malone.

Malone has given us, without believing in its application to Shakespeare, the following passage from *An Epistle to the Gentlemen Students of the two Universities*, by Thomas Nashe, prefixed to Robert Greene's *Arcadia*, the first edition of which is dated 1589:—"I will turn back to my first text of studies of delight, and talk a little in friendship with a few of our trivial translators. It is a common practice now-a-days, among a sort of shifting companions, that runne through every art, and thrive by none, to leave the trade of *noverint*, whereto they were born, and busie themselves with the endeavours of art, that could scarcely Latinize their neck-verse, if they should have need; yet English *Seneca*, read by candle-light, yeelds many good sentences, as *blood is a beggar*,* and so forth: and if you intreat him fair, in a frosty morning, he will affoord you whole

* Might not these very words, or something similar, have been in the original sketch of *Hamlet*? Or might not Nashe have quoted a phrase from the translation of Seneca, in allusion to such passages as the following, in the fourth act?

"Your fat king, and your lean beggar, is but variable service."

"To show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar."

I regret that it has been out of my power to obtain a sight of *Seneca, his Tenne Tragedies*, London, 1581; in order to discover if it contains "blood is a beggar," or any proof of its having been read by Shakespeare.

hamlets ; I should say, handfuls of tragical speeches. But, O grief ! *Tempus edax rerum*,—what is that will last always ? The sea, exhaled by drops, will, in continuance, be drie ; and *Seneca*, let blood line by line, and page by page, at length must needs die to our stage.”

The word *Hamlets*, according to Dr. Farmer, was thus distinguished by italics in the original edition ; of this Malone was not aware. Such punning allusions were frequent. The passage is in the same taste, and in the same spirit of jealousy, as that by Greene himself, to whose *Arcadia*, that of Nashe was prefixed, wherein he called Shakespeare “an upstart crow ;”—“one who supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you !”—“in his own conceit the only shake-scene in the country.” Surely the evidence is as strong in one case as in the other. No one doubts of Greene’s allusion, with or without italics ; nor can I agree with Malone, that “the phrase *Hamlets* is certainly intelligible without supposing an allusion to the play.” There is but one objection of seeming weight, which is, that *Hamlet* must have been played as early as 1589. It has always struck me that the chronologers of his plays have fixed too late a period for the appearance of the first in 1591, for which there is no authority. Malone, Chalmers, and Dr. Drake, place the first performance of *Hamlet* in 1596 or 7, on very uncertain grounds. That it was, in its present state, an early work, can hardly be conceived ; but it was first brought forward as a mere sketch, compared with its after appearance. Is it at all unlikely that the first sketch was popular,

and written when Shakespeare was four-and-twenty? "The piece, however," says Malone, speaking of *Hamlet*, "which was then (first) exhibited, was probably but a rude sketch of that which we now possess; for, from the title-page of the first edition, in 1604, we learn, that (like *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) it had been enlarged to almost twice its original size."

That which at once establishes the passage as being aimed at Shakespeare, and proves he had been a lawyer's clerk, is to be found in his works. Law phrases are strangely numerous there, as noticed by Malone and Chalmers. Of course they are more observable, according to the subject, in some plays than in others. But what is most to the purpose, lest it should be said they were acquired in London, is to show that in his earliest works,—his poems,—his mind was astonishingly haunted by professional terms; the verses continually offering metaphors and illustrations, picked up from the desk of a lawyer. I shall quote the most remarkable lines out of many that I have marked, nor did I seek for them attentively when I marked them. Besides which, I took no notice of his constant references to "debts," "loans," "quittance," and similar phrases of an accountant, though they might be ranked among a country lawyer's terms. Altogether, they swarm in his poems, even to deformity. To begin with some from *Venus and Adonis*, — the subject was surely no temptation to them.

"Being judge in love, she cannot right her cause."

- “ But when the heart’s attorney once is mute,
The client breaks, as desperate in his suit.”
- “ Her eyes petitioners to his eyes suing.”
- “ But when he saw his love, his youth’s fair fee.”
- “ Which purchase if thou make, for fear of slips,
Set thy seal-manual on my wax-red lips.”
- “ Say for non-payment that the debt should double.”
- “ The honey-fee of parting tender’d is.”
- “ Her pleading hath deserv’d a greater fee.”
- “ Thou art the next of blood, and ’tis thy right.”

Let us now turn to the *Rape of Lucrece*.

- “ An expired date cancell’d ere well begun.”
- “ All orators are dumb when beauty pleadeth.”
- “ Pleads in a wilderness, where are no laws.”
- “ End thy ill aim before thy suit be ended.”
- “ I sue for exiled majesty’s repeal.”
- “ Dim register ! and notary of shame !”
- “ When wilt thou be the humble suppliant’s friend,
And bring him where thy suit may be obtain’d ?”
- “ For me I force not argument a straw,
Since that my case is past the help of law.”
- “ This brief abridgement of my will I make.”
- “ No rightful plea might plead for justice there.”
- “ Hath served a dumb arrest upon his tongue.”

The subjects of these two poems are most adverse to such phraseology ; but in the *Sonnets*, where the

poet speaks in his own person, describing his own feelings, the following instances might perhaps be trebled.

“ But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes.”

“ Proving his beauty by succession thine.”

“ What acceptable audit canst thou leave?”

“ That use is not forbidden usury,
Which happies those that make the willing loan.”

“ Ah ! if thou issueless shalt hap to die.”

“ So should that beauty which you hold in lease.”

“ And summer's lease hath all too short a date.”

“ When to the sessions of sweet silent thought,
I summon up remembrance of things past.”

“ Thy adverse party is thy advocate.”

“ And 'gainst thyself a lawful plea commence.”

“ Call'd to that audit by advised respects.”

“ To leave poor me thou hast the strength of laws,
Since, why to love, I can allege no cause.”

“ But be contented ; when that fell arrest,
Without all bail, shall carry me away.”

“ The barren tender of a poet's debt.”

“ The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing.”

“ So thy great gift, upon misprision growing.”

“ Of faults conceal'd wherein I am attainted.”

“ Which works on leases of short-number'd hours.”

“ And I myself am mortgaged in thy will.”

“ He learnt, but surety-like, to write for me.”

“ Why so large cost, having so short a lease ?”

“ My heart doth plead, that thou in him dost lie,
(A closet never pierced with crystal eyes,)
But the defendant doth that plea deny,
And says in him thy fair appearance lies.
To 'cide this title is impannelled
A quest of thoughts, all tenants to the heart ;
And by their verdict is determined
The clear eye's moiety.”

After reading such lines in the poems of a young man, if critics should hesitate at coming to the conclusion that he had been employed in the office of a lawyer, unless the lines bore the semblance of being imitatively and not spontaneously written, my faith in all internal evidence will be shaken. But, believing that none will differ from me in this point, I assume that Shakespeare, while in the country, was in such an office. Thus the above quotations, the one from Nashe, as aimed at Shakespeare, and the deduction from the lines extracted, prove each the other. Now, relying on the settlement of the question respecting the purpose of Nashe, and that he, which is highly probable, wrote on good information, since his design was to identify his object by known facts, we arrive at two circumstances in the life of our poet, which are valuable :—

First, *Hamlet*, in its original state, however crude, was brought on the stage with applause sufficient to excite envy against the author, when he was about four-and-twenty. This will be found important in the second period of his life.

Second, Shakespeare, while in a lawyer's office,

“ busied himself in the endeavours of art,” “ by candle light,” in giving being to his dramatic powers, assisted by an “ English Seneca.” A translation of Seneca was published in 1581;—that is, when he was seventeen. Such an account, describing his young efforts at fame, his industry at a period of life not often voluntarily industrious, and the means he pursued for the developement of his mind, is most interesting, and congenial to my view of his character.

The ordinary knowledge, possessed by every one, of human nature, has always appeared to me baffled and contradicted by the early life, as it has been given to us, of Shakespeare. It is in vain to say his extraordinary powers must be at variance with all ordinary knowledge. Though gifted far beyond us, he was a human being formed like ourselves, subject to the same feelings and passions, for good and for evil, or he could not have described ours so accurately and intensely; and he was excited to exertion by the love of fame, or by necessity, like others, with faculties, which, similiar to his own corporeal being, must have been infantine before they grew into a giant's strength. Those faculties also must have been aptly exercised while he was young, or they could not have become so wonderfully strong. As soon could I believe that his body grew in one day from puling childhood to healthy manhood, or without the benefit of exercise, as that his mind lay dormant, (so we are told, with the exception of a paltry ballad, which I consider spurious, on Sir Thomas Lucy) till he had been some years in London, when his genius burst forth in a sudden blaze. The nearer we judge of

him as a fellow being, the more likely are we to form a correct judgment of him, and the greater honour will be paid to his memory. Instead of regarding him as a young idle vagabond,—for such has ever been the implication,—one who heeded not self-improvement, one who did nothing to benefit himself, but on whom nature, unnaturally bounteous, bestowed unsought the choicest gifts that ever mortal owned ; instead of these unphilosophical, inconceivable notions, let us feel disposed to believe, and we may readily believe, he was industrious, prudent, earnest, grasping from his boyhood at all knowledge within his reach, and feeding his mind into vigour by exertion, while he strove to imitate his “ English Seneca,” or while he wrote his *Venus and Adonis*.

This poem, dedicated to the Earl of Southampton in 1593, and specially designated by him,—“ the first heir of my invention,” I suppose to have been written, together with the *Rape of Lucrece*, at Stratford. The expressions in the dedication, “ if your honour seem but pleased, I can account myself highly praised, and vow to take advantage of all idle hours, till I have honoured you with some graver labour ;” and “ if the first heir of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so noble a godfather, and never after ear so barren a land for fear it yield me still so bad a harvest ;” these are not necessarily to be understood as relating to works for the stage, but rather to poems, of higher estimation in those days, for private reading. There is no direct authority, whereon I can ground the supposition that these two poems were written before his arrival in London ; it rests solely on likelihood,

which may not influence another, nor is it absolutely requisite that it should. Still one who, however much he has read, has studied nothing but Shakespeare for thirty years, has reason to think his mere opinion may be acceptable to many, while it can offend none, unless he dogmatically founds a theory upon it. Were it my wish to act in this manner, I should refrain, well aware of the futility of such a course.

My opinion is formed respecting the early composition of these poems; first, on the fact bequeathed to us by the jealousy of Nashe; secondly, on the complexion of the works themselves; and lastly, on the improbability of our poet having had "the advantage of idle hours," after he became an actor and a dramatic writer.

First, a lad enamoured of literature, so as to devote his leisure hours, away from his profession, to the study of Seneca, would, as all other such lads have done, and ever will do, attempt something himself in literature. Why his attempt was not dramatic is obvious, if we consider that the younger we are the more ambitious are our pursuits; and plays were then, and till he made them otherwise, in low regard, except for public amusement, compared to other kinds of poetry. The lurking genius within him, therefore, might have prompted him to Seneca, while his ambition perforce directed him to narrative, and that in its most approved form at the time, which was classic or mythological. With this literary ambition, partly proved and partly presumed, I think he wrote *Venus and Adonis* and the *Rape of Lucrece* before he was one-and-twenty. Secondly, both bear the appearance

of having been written by a very young man. Were two similar poems now brought to me, in spite of their numerous passages of beauty and their descriptive power, I should certainly conclude they were the works of a youth; and by no means of so great promise of future excellence as the *Endymion* of Keats, which was the work of a youth of about twenty. The picture drawn of the horse of Adonis, of "the timorous flying hare," of the wounded hounds, as they are met by Venus, and of the various objects of fresh rural beauty, if not of the highest order, is delightful. How many passages might be brought forward to prove that the writer was a genuine poet! But among so many delicate touches, the want of breadth, of bold expression; the constant recurrence to outward description, leaving the inward feeling no more than hinted at, or couched in general terms—an inevitable fault attending inexperience in the workings of the human heart; the prevailing imitation of the great poet of the time, Spenser, for we begin by imitation of what we most enjoy; all these together, to my mind, stamp the poem of *Venus and Adonis* with the character of youth. The same observations, allowing for the difference of subject, may be applied to the *Rape of Lucrece*. Tarquin's desire struggling with remorse, as uttered by himself, like the love-pleading of Venus, is more in the manner of an observer of outward symptoms, than of one who inwardly describes the heavings and the throes of passions in violent contention. The after agony of Lucrece is declamatory or argumentative, not pathetic; while her death, and the grief of her husband and

friends are related more as facts to be recorded than as a tale of pity. In vain I look for the faintest indication of his dramatic power, which argues that his mind was in no way interested in the drama at that period; "heavy" Seneca, the epithet he afterwards bestowed on him in *Hamlet*, could not inspire his genius. *Venus and Adonis* is far superior to the *Rape of Lucrece*; the difference of scene between a woodland and the walls of a palace sufficiently explains this, since a young poet is best recognized in his vivid painting of natural objects. Both poems are equally imbued with the spirit of Spenser, lacking his experience. My third and last reason is, that Shakespeare, when in London, if he followed his newly adopted profession eagerly, which, besides his studies as an actor, he assuredly did, by his having produced the first sketch of *Hamlet* at the end of three or four years, implying much previous application to dramatic composition, would neither have had time nor inclination to compose either of these narrative poems.

He must now be examined touching deer-stealing. Tradition tells us he was prosecuted with so much rigour by Sir Thomas Lucy, for stealing his deer, that the delinquent was obliged to fly the country. Never was there a stronger instance of the worthless gossip of tradition. Malone has proved that Sir T. Lucy never possessed deer; and the statutes of the time prove that the penalty for stealing deer was of too mild a character to compel flight. With these facts before him, Dr. Lardner, "assisted by eminent literary and scientific men," acknowledges that the

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tradition is refuted; but, nevertheless, he insists it must have had "some kind of foundation in fact," because we find in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, that Sir T. Lucy is held up to ridicule in the person of Justice Shallow. Dr. Lardner, therefore, supposes that young Shakespeare was brought before Sir T. Lucy, as a magistrate, "for stealing deer in some other park." There is, I cannot forbear saying it, more malice than charity in this supposition; more of the qualities of a Mrs. Candour than ought to be found in a reverend doctor. If indeed the tradition must have been founded in fact, why might not the prosecution have been against one of young Shakespeare's friends? or why may not Shakespeare himself have been wrongfully accused? Why invent and raise a supposititious tale, on an assumed foundation, against the greatest human being the world has produced, or even against the meanest wretch that ever existed? The Reverend Doctor indeed confesses that in those days deer-stealing was not a crime, but rather a frolic; that a Right Reverend Father-in-God, a Bishop of Winchester, had committed it, and that another bishop had partaken of the spoil; yet he still contrives, in Mrs. Candour's peculiar way, to attach some undefined stigma on the memory of our poet. When the *Merry Wives of Windsor* was first performed, Dr. Lardner informs us, Sir T. Lucy was dead; this fact, to my imagination, makes it impossible that Shakespeare would have held his failings, when alive, to ridicule; and I am, consequently, induced to believe it was his son who was ridiculed. An allusion, not positive, to the family coat of arms

seems to show that one or the other was meant ; and Justice Shallow thus accuses Falstaff: "Knight, you have beaten my men, killed my deer, and broke open my lodge." The old knight of Charlecote, it is known, was a rigid preserver of game, and so might have been the son. In answer to a calumnious supposition, I beg leave to suggest, and I think it a likely solution of the riddle, that Shakespeare attacked, on the stage, the younger knight of Charlecote for his vexatiously jealous preservation of game, and that he was prosecuted for that attack. Such a prosecution would necessarily have created much gossip in Warwickshire, coupled with the words of part of the libel "killed my deer," and thus might tradition have converted the whole story into a prosecution against Shakespeare himself for deer-stealing. Had the tradition never been treated otherwise than in the pleasant, good-humoured, honest vein of the author of the *Citation and Examination of William Shakespeare, and others, touching Deer-stealing*, I should not have attempted a refutation.

It may be observed that I have bestowed the word "prudent" on the youth of Shakespeare. This was done advisedly ; but perhaps it ought to be mentioned that I mean it in the best sense, not in its unsocial, formal, and selfish signification. When I come to speak of his entire character through life, among other good qualities, a wise prudence, on all essential points, will be found conspicuous ; and since I have never met with a prudent middle-aged or old man who had passed his youth imprudently, it is not easy for me to conceive the opposite. At the same

time, let it be understood, that it is out of my power to imagine the lad Shakespeare to have been anything else than a hearty lover of good fellowship, as he afterwards showed himself at the “Mermaid,” a right merry companion, the delight of his mates at Stratford, and in the neighbourhood.

Little is known of Anne Hathaway, his wife. Stevens, in a note, tells us,—“As Shakespeare the poet married his wife from Shattery, a village near Stratford, possibly he might become possessor of a remarkable *house* there, as part of her portion; and jointly with his wife convey it as part of their daughter Judith’s portion to Thomas Queeny. It is certain that one Queeny, an elderly gentleman, sold it to — Harvey, Esq. of Stockton, near Southam, Warwickshire, father of John Harvey Thursby, Esq. of Abington, near Northampton; and that the aforesaid Harvey sold it again to Samuel Tyler, Esq. whose sisters, as his heirs, now enjoy it.” It is reasonably conjectured that she brought him some property.

The marriage is not registered at Stratford. According to the Stratford register of the first birth, of his daughter Susannah, he was married, in all probability, soon after entering his nineteenth year. His two other children, twins, were baptised at Stratford, in the following year, 2nd of February, 1584-5.

From the last mentioned date he must have been above twenty when he quitted his native town for London. Nothing has yet been discovered to fix the precise period; but probably he was about that age at the time. We are also ignorant whether he took his wife and children with him, or if, from the first,

he paid occasional visits to Stratford, as tradition, backed by some circumstances, informs us he did through a long course of years, till he finally retired thither.

At length, it is generally agreed that his love of the stage impelled him to London. He may have had, in addition, some friendly offers of encouragement to this change of profession. "He could not," says Malone, "have wanted an easy introduction to the theatre; for Thomas Greene, a celebrated comedian, was his townsman, perhaps his relation, and Michael Drayton was likewise born in Warwickshire; the latter was nearly of his own age, and both were in some degree of reputation soon after the year 1590." If there is such a thing as an innate propensity, we can readily accord it to Shakespeare for the theatre; and, if so, it was fostered and brought into action by the visits, from time to time, of companies of players at Stratford. Indeed his natural inclination for the profession might have met with excitement enough to raise it to a passion; since, without looking back to former years, when he was at the age of twelve, again when he was fifteen, and every following year, the players were in his town. At one of these visits, doubtless, his townsman or relative, Thomas Greene, when he was of the company, took him by the hand, and led him delighted among his fellows.

HIS LIFE, FROM 1585 TO 1600.

OUR first care must be to brush aside any little rubbish thrown in our way by unsupported tradition or sheer invention. That story, repeated by Dr. Johnson, of Shakespeare's having, on his first coming to London, been employed in holding gentlemen's horses at the play-house door, has been so amply and utterly disproved by Stevens, that it remains an impossible anecdote. Then Rowe states, "he was received into the company then in being, at first in a very mean rank;" and Malone mentions that there was a stage tradition of his first office having been that of prompter's attendant. It is more likely that he was received into the company as a shareholder, though that is scarcely probable; for, thanks to the persevering researches, during the last few years, of Mr. Collier, we are certain he was a shareholder at least as early as November 1589. I say at least as early, because he was then not at the bottom of the list, but the twelfth from the top, among sixteen. I refer the reader to Mr. J. Payne Collier's *New Facts regarding the Life of Shakespeare*, for which I feel

the utmost gratitude; without his *facts* I should have been driven into many lengthened explanations of many a conjecture, which he has placed on irrefragable documents. The position of Shakespeare's name on the list is worthy of particular remark, as the names appear to have stood according to seniority, or the number of shares possessed by each; witness the gradual rise of his name in after documents, till it became the second on the list. The shares consisted of twenty, some partners holding more than one. Instead of listening to idle gossip, gravely reported, about the meanness of his first employments in London, Mr. Collier has given us cause for astonishment at the rapidity of his success. Within four years, or at most five, he was joint proprietor of the Blackfriars Theatre, with one-fourth of the list below him; thus leaving little time, or rather no time at all, for previous mean employments or idleness.

Two things are specially to be avoided in forming our judgment on the character of Shakespeare: a preternatural estimation of his genius, and a notion that he must have had more faults than ourselves. The latter is a consequence of the former; because when we have exalted a fellow-creature far above our own level, our offended pride, at the sight of his unattainable superiority, is apt to fly to detraction, if no other means are within our reach, in order to pull him down again. This observation is not intended to apply to any individual, but to the million. Shakespeare is represented as overcoming, in his own despite, unconquerable difficulties, all at once, by dint of an unimaginable and uncontrollable genius; while

others, that our pride may not be too much humbled, assert or insinuate he was an idle improvident youth; one who, as a poet, “knew his trade,” according to Dr. Johnson, of a flatterer, and a sad libertine according to many. No one has chosen to point out how untenable are these accusations—how they may be withstood. That “flattering unction” to mediocrity, inculcating a persuasion that a man with the strongest mind must inevitably have also the weakest mind, has long been a restorative administered by quacks.

If he had not money of his own to buy a share in the theatre—and who can presume he had?—he obtained it by his exertions as an actor and an author, but principally as an author. This is by no means incredible; it only proves that his mental powers were great, that he was industrious, and that some of his plays were produced very soon after his arrival in London. A contrary supposition, that he led for some years a dissipated town life, insisted on by Dr. Lardner, and that he did nothing but act, and write two poems, as some of his editors have assumed—poems irrelevant to his profession, not for gain, but for his own amusement, with a wife and three children at home, or in order to compliment a young nobleman with his dedications—is too marvellous to be mentioned out of romance, where human nature is, by common consent, permitted to play an inferior part.

Thus, since he certainly possessed a share in the theatre in 1589, we may well credit the account of the performance, in that very year, of his *Hamlet*; that is, as it was first played, wanting its present grander

poetry and passion. We have no vestige of *Hamlet* in its first state; but if it was not superior to his *Romeo and Juliet*, before that tragedy was re-written, there is not the slightest difficulty in supposing it was one of his first dramatic attempts.

Judging from the plays we possess, I have always set down, in my mind, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* as his first. In that comedy, sweet and fresh as the language is, there is a timidity of expression, nothing of deep-rooted and powerful passion, inexperience in the scene, and its mood is altogether rather pleasing than exciting; yet, with these objections, character is admirably conceived and preserved, and the very soul of Shakespeare shines, however faintly, throughout. The whole play, in its serious parts, runs sweetly, but languidly, much in this strain:—

“ O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day;
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away !”

A notion has prevailed that his first literary occupation in the theatre was confined to the adaptation or improvement of plays by other authors. As far as the three parts of *Henry the Sixth* and *Pericles* are concerned, this may well have been; but I can neither trace his mind nor his manner, both so peculiarly his own, in any of his apocryphal plays, or in any other plays of the period not ascribed to him. *Titus Andronicus*, strangely printed in every edition, against the opinion of every succeeding editor, has not a line of the remotest resemblance to him. This tragedy of

physical horrors ought to be included in the works of Marlowe. It is very likely that the horrors in *Lust's Dominion* had proved acceptable to the audience, before Shakespeare had raised his higher claims, and that, therefore, Marlowe was induced to rewrite the subject, varying the form, as in *Titus Andronicus*; since there is not a shade of difference between the two Moors Eleazar and Aaron, or between the two queens and their love for the Moors. Besides which, the physical horrors are all repeated with additions, and it is easy to point out in *Titus Andronicus* the occasional "mighty line," for which Marlowe is famed. Compared to the worst work that so superior a being as Shakespeare could have produced, this tragedy, in feeling more than in execution, is disgraceful, and ought never more to appear under his name. The original fault lay with Meres and the editors of the first folio; but since the fault is acknowledged by all their successors, is it proper to perpetuate it? 12183.

Pericles may well stand in its stead, not in addition to it, as it does in some modern editions. In this lengthened legend of a tragedy, if my pencil-marks, joined to those of a friend, a true lover of Shakespeare, and which we made apart from each other, have any weight, just two-fifths of the lines are from Shakespeare's pen. A most rambling and improbable fable, with weak or no attempts at character, is here embellished, amidst bald lines, with poetry and dramatic effect worthy of our poet. Almost the whole of the last act, however, and two whole scenes in the third act, I would pronounce to be his undoubted property.

Pericles delighted our ancestors; and it was thought worth while to improve it. I even suspect it had been once improved before Shakespeare took it in hand.

As for the six plays, added to his, after the first folio, *Lochrine*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, *Yorkshire Tragedy*, *Lord Cromwell*, *The Puritan*, and *The London Prodigal*, I have read them attentively, and cannot perceive a hint of Shakespeare's power or philosophy in any one of them, though I regard them as intended imitations, published at the time with a purpose of deceiving the public.

The three chronologers of his plays, except in four instances, differ but little from each other. An attempt, for Malone calls it no more, to fix on the precise year for the production of each play, might have been no easy task for the Blackfriars' company themselves, after a lapse of a few years. Indeed, such precision would not be of use, unless as a guide to other matters; and, in that case, certainty is necessary. Had Mr. Collier made his discoveries in the time of Malone, the latter would have seen good reason for fixing the first play at a much earlier period than 1591. As it was, he felt compelled to crowd seventeen plays, together with the poems, within the space of eight years. He comments on the fact, that Webbe, in his *Discourse of English Poetry*, published 1586, that Puttenham, in his *Art of English Poesy*, published 1589, and that Sir John Harrington, in his *Apologie for Poetry*, published 1591, all of whom made some mention of play-writers, "passed by unnoticed the new prodigy in the dramatic

world." But it appears, by Malone's account, the first noticed only Whetstone and Munday; the second only Lord Buckhurst, Ferrys, the Earl of Oxford, and Edwardes; and the third, only two comedies of the day. If their omission is any thing, such writers for the stage as Heywood, Peele, Greene, Marlowe, and others, had produced nothing at the above dates; or, if they were unworthy of notice in the estimation of those critics, we need not wonder at their silence in regard to the adaptations of *Henry the Sixth*, and the first dramatic efforts of Shakespeare.

There is no direct contemporary notice of his works earlier than that by Francis Meres, in his *Wit's Treasury*, printed at the close of 1598. Speaking of Shakespeare as a dramatist, his words are these: "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy, among the Latins; so Shakespeare, among the English, is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage: for comedy, witness his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love's Labour Lost*, his *Love's Labour Wonne*, his *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and his *Merchant of Venice*; for tragedy, his *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV*, *K. John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet*."

Love's Labour Wonne was perhaps another title for *All's well that ends well*. 'The *Merchant of Venice* was not entered at Stationers' Hall till the 22nd July of that very year. Meres must have been deceived (every editor agrees) in placing *Titus Andronicus* in the list. He may have omitted the three parts of *Henry the Sixth*, as plays not entirely

written by our poet. Thus, though the list by no means bears the appearance of having been carefully made out, (for he knew not what painful comments would be made on it) still it contains much that is valuable, and on which we can rely.

Mr. Collier has furnished us with other useful facts. In 1589 the company of Blackfriars were obliged to send in an exculpatory petition to the Privy Council; and in 1596 the same course was pursued, because "certain persons, (some of them of honour) inhabitants of the said precinct and libertie of the Blackfriars, have, as your petitioners are informed, besought your honourable lordships not to permit the said private house any longer to remain open, but hereafter to be shut up and closed, to the manifest and great injurie of your petitioners," &c. From this document, it is evident that the influence of men of power in the state was important to the preservation of the company against the active enmity of some of the principal citizens. In the same petition, we find the company were accustomed to "be called on to perform for the recreation and solace of her majestie and her honourable court;" and assuredly the nobility, the younger branches in particular, were frequenters of the Blackfriars' Theatre, and would, some of them, seek the society of the actors or the authors. Situated as the company were, we can, in this manner, readily account for the circumstance of *Venus and Adonis* being dedicated to the Earl of Southampton in 1593, followed by the *Rape of Lucrece* in 1594. Two unpublished poems, though written ten years before, were thus made serviceable as a compliment to a

nobleman, who might prove, literally, a friend at court. Though *Venus and Adonis* is declared "the first heir of his invention," it was not pretended to be written expressly for him, but rather as having been written some time, in contradistinction to his plays, which are indirectly promised to his future patronage, when published together; for I hold, as I shall attempt to prove, that Shakespeare did intend to edit his own works. That the young earl had himself desired this public compliment from the poet, with whom he had become acquainted, or, at least, that he was gratified by it, is shown, in the dedication of the *Rape of Lucrece*, by these words:—"The warrant I have of your honourable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance." In return, and in pure friendship, the Earl no doubt exerted himself for the protection of the company, who maintained their post against the ill-will of some of the citizens; and it is delightful to add, that his friendship was not short-lived. This last is proved by another document, with which Mr. Collier has obliged us; a letter from the Earl of Southampton, which Mr. Collier conjectures was written about 1606, addressed to Lord Ellesmere, in favour of Shakespeare. That the Earl had ever presented him with a thousand pounds, is incredible, and rests on no authority whatever. This is its origin: after the death of Sir William D'Avenant, who was not likely, ignorant as he was of every thing else in Shakespeare's life, to know that extraordinary circumstance, it was related by some nameless person, who

assured Rowe that the story was handed down by D'Avenant,—and there it should have stopped.

But had our poet no other friend among the nobility? This question brings me at last to the *Sonnets*, now that I have endeavoured to show the nature of his situation up to the period when I conceive the first part of them was written.

I am not aware that an argument has been publicly attempted against the genuineness of the *Sonnets*. Many years ago, it was urged to me, in conversation, and it has since been told me, (perhaps erroneously) that a disproof of their authenticity is in preparation. Thus, to the long-continued difficulty of comprehending their meaning, that of discovering by whom they were written may be superadded. Such a task must be deduced from one or more of the following species of evidence.

First, we must be satisfied that Meres wrongfully ascribed the *Sonnets* to Shakespeare, or that he meant some other unknown sonnets, or the six others which are known; and that their publication, under Shakespeare's name, during his life, uncontradicted by himself or any other person, is of no weight. Certainly other men's plays were printed in his time, with his name and initials attached to them; and Meres gave him the discredit of *Titus Andronicus*. But though Meres might have fallen into an error by echoing a common report, in which he was afterwards upheld by Heminge and Condell, our poet's personal friends, yet, as his account bears the semblance of honesty and disinterestedness, it cannot well be

believed that he, a literary man, was mistaken in speaking of poems, which were circulated in manuscript, as Shakespeare's, among his private friends.

Secondly, it will be necessary to bring forward contemporaneous evidence in opposition to that of Meres, which has not hitherto been discovered.

Thirdly, internal evidence, on which we solely rely for the authenticity of his several works, must here be kept aloof from the argument. There is not one of his dramas, not even *Lear*, which may not be doubted as belonging to him, laying aside its internal evidence; the same which guides our judgment on the truth, falsehood, or error, of his printers and editors. Such must inevitably be the fate, when coexisting witnesses are no more, of all works, unless edited by the author himself, or irrefragably acknowledged by him. In regard to the *Sonnets*, every thing short of internal evidence is but a feather in the scale.

It is true I shall have occasion to notice the inferiority of some of these sonnets, compared with the poetry of Shakespeare's plays. Dramatic, and other kinds of poetry, are so distinct, that they are never found worthy of equal praise in the same writer; and, therefore, our judgment ought not to be influenced by the comparative inferiority of one. But as I proceed, it will be seen that many of the *Sonnets*, chiefly those of a later date, belong to the highest species of poetry in their kind; owing, as I conjecture, to the habit he had acquired of writing on a subject perfectly undramatic, and to his own good
* sense in no longer yielding to the fashion of the day.

*If we read the poems of his contemporaries,—not dramatists,—the superiority of the best of these will be instantly acknowledged, to anything which they produced. Let them be compared to Spenser's *Sonnets*; and Spenser himself will be poor indeed. Should their authenticity be absolutely disproved, where shall we find the extraordinary other poet who had written them? The worst among them, deformed as they are by forced and intricately-woven thoughts, have lines most worthy of Shakespeare.*

Without at present laying any stress on the frequent occurrence of law phrases, already brought forward, which is observable in all his works, and in no other author's, I would ask, how are we to account for the very great number of parallel passages found in these *Sonnets* and his plays? They would rather impede and distract, than serve my present purpose; though, on a fitter occasion than the explanation of their meaning, I shall mark them severally. Now I shall confine myself to two or three only in elucidation.

Again, the author was not only a great poet, but also an actor, as may be seen in the 110th and following sonnets. Who but Shakespeare could it have been?

In conclusion, I appeal to the good feeling expressed throughout, in accordance with all that Shakespeare has written, all that has come down to us respecting him, and all that we can desire to imagine of him. This good feeling has not been understood; it will be my fault if I do not make it evident in my explanation.

HIS SONNETS.

THE first difficulty, and to that, strangely enough, research has been chiefly confined, is the discovery of who was "Mr. W. H." Thorpe, their first publisher, inscribed them—"To the only begetter of these ensuing Sonnets, Mr. W. H."

An opinion has been broached that these initials ought to be reversed, because then W. H. would be H. W., and stand for Henry Wriothesly, Earl of Southampton. Dr. Drake was decidedly of this opinion, and backed it by observing the coincidence of expression between the 26th Sonnet and the dedication of the *Rape of Lucrece* to that nobleman. This is very true and very reasonable, except the reversing of the initials, which may not be perfectly satisfactory to a straightforward understanding. Besides, the title "Mr." never could belong to an Earl.

But some of Dr. Drake's predecessors were wild in the extreme. When Gildon republished the *Sonnets*, he specified, in the title-page, that they were "all of them in praise of his mistress." Dr. Sewell followed with a similar assertion. Stevens gave his edition,

but refrained from hazarding an observation. At last Malone rightly declared that one hundred and twenty-six of them were addressed to a young man. Tyrwhit pointed out a line,

“A man in hue all *hues* in his controlling,”

from which it was for awhile inferred that the initials W. H. stood for William *Hughes*. Dr. Farmer supposed them to be addressed to William Harte, the poet's nephew; but unluckily Malone proved that the nephew could not have been born at the time, or could only have been an infant. Then came Dr. Chalmers, who contended, and pursued his contention in a second volume, that every one of them was addressed to no less a personage than Queen Elizabeth. He seriously tells us that we have merely to change, (than which nothing can be easier) “he” for *she*, and “him” for *her*, and regard every thing appertaining to a young man as the natural and undoubted property of an old woman of sixty-five, when every difficulty is removed, and every line is intelligible! Some time since we read in the newspapers of a deranged gentleman, walking about the country, and professing to be, in his own person, her most gracious majesty, queen Elizabeth;—the notion must have been originally his, not that of Dr. Chalmers. The Rev. Mr. Dyce has not understood them; he merely favours us with an ingenious supposition.

Truth is, the commentators either neglected the *Sonnets*, defamed them, or otherwise misunderstood them. My brain has been, at all times, more puzzled by those gentlemen than by the subject under discussion; owing, possibly, to their minds being chiefly

intent on dates, verbal researches, and excessive conjectures. Yet their patient studies, far as their limits extended, are of undoubted and great utility. I am grateful to them all,—Bishop Warburton, and one or two others, excepted; because I cannot perceive they have been of any benefit. As for Malone, though he endeavoured to cancel every obligation by bribing the sexton of Stratford church to let him whitewash or white-paint the monument and coloured effigy of Shakespeare, he has not entirely cancelled it with me.

The name of the individual to whom the *Sonnets* were addressed is surely a matter of minor importance, compared to the unravelling of their meaning. Were the individual, beyond the shadow of a doubt, made known, the discovery could not alter, in the slightest degree, the meaning or feeling of a single verse. Nothing would be elucidated by it. Certainty on this head, interested as we are in every person, and in everything, connected with our poet, would be, in itself, a satisfaction, a pleasure, but no farther. Still, a satisfaction or pleasure is worth seeking, and I will endeavour to find it.

From the Sonnets themselves we distinctly learn, by particular passages, and by their whole tenor, that “W. H.” must have been very young, remarkably handsome, of high birth and fortune, and a friend of Shakespeare. His youth and beauty, not being factitious advantages, are constant themes for praise; and his birth and fortune are proved, exclusive of other evidences, expressly from the following lines in the 37th Sonnet.

" For whether beauty, *birth*, or *wealth*, or wit,
 Or any of these all, or all, or more,
Entitled in thy parts, do crowned sit,
 I make my love engrafted to this store :
 So then I am not lame, poor, nor despised,
 Whilst that this shadow doth such substance give,
 That I in thy abundance am sufficed,
 And by a part of *all thy glory* live."

Passages might be produced in farther evidence, such as, in the 80th Sonnet,

" Your shallowest help will hold me up afloat."

Besides, the whole of Sonnets 57 and 58, as well as of some others, have the air, not to be mistaken, of addresses to some one of rank.

Granting that the qualities of youth, beauty of person, high birth, wealth, and friendship for Shakespeare, are all applicable to the Earl of Southampton, yet, with deference to Dr. Drake, they may be all equally applicable to another, without reversing the initials, which is objectionable. The Earl of Southampton was not the only ennobled friend of Shakespeare. Possibly there were several of the nobility of the time who conferred that honour on themselves. We certainly know of two others, William, Earl of Pembroke, and Philip, his brother, earl of Montgomery, to both of whom Heminge and Condell dedicated their folio edition of Shakespeare. Their words in the dedication are,—“ But since your lordships have been pleased to think these trifles something heretofore, and *have prosecuted both them, AND THEIR AUTHOR* LIVING, *with so much favour*; we hope, (that they outliving him, and he not having the fate, common

with some, to be executor to his own writings) you will use the same indulgence towards them, *you have done unto their parent.*" Consequently "Mr. W. H." according to my perception, and as conjecture has already pointed out, may, with every probability short of certainty, have been William Herbert, afterwards, when the folio was published, William, Earl of Pembroke. Not only do the initials belong to the name, but the title, "Mr." was not improperly applied to the eldest son of an Earl, there not having been, at that period, any grander title of courtesy.

But it is necessary to consider the time when the *Sonnets* were written, together with the age of William Herbert, and they will not be found contradictory. That young nobleman might have been eighteen years old, not more, but probably a year younger, when the first part was addressed to him; an age when he might well be termed "boy," and in accordance with the feeling of the poems. In proof of this, he was born in 1580, and it was in November, 1598,* that Meres, in his *Wit's Treasury*, noticed the *Sonnets* of Shakespeare as being then circulated in manuscript among his friends. They were not printed till 1609. Were there authority for believing that Meres, in his notice, alluded to all the *Sonnets* as we possess them, then the first part must have been written at least three years before they were spoken of by him: that is, when William Herbert could not have been more than fifteen years old; because Sonnet 104th, belonging to the last part, expressly says,—

* In the spring of this year, William Herbert, with his father's consent, came to London, and continued to reside there. See *Lodge's Portraits*.

“ Three winters cold
 Have from the forests shook three summers' pride,
 * * * * *
 Since first I saw you fresh which yet are green.”

and Sonnet 102 proves that Shakespeare's verse was addressed to him during their early acquaintance-ship ;—

“ Our love was new, and then but in the spring,
 When I was wont to greet it with my lays.”

But it is highly probable that Meres spoke of no more than the first twenty-six sonnets, (which I shall prove form one entire poem ;) though possibly of the second poem also, together with that to his mistress, when the young nobleman had reached the age of eighteen, if Meres noticed them the year when they were written, or of seventeen, if they were a year old when noticed, an age agreeing with the never-ending allusions to the freshness of his youth, and not altogether an improper age to be addressed on the subject of this first poem, which is marriage,—at least by Shakespeare, who himself was married at about eighteen.

William, Earl of Pembroke, the nephew of Sir Philip Sidney, succeeded to his father in 1601, was knight of the garter in 1604, Governor of Portsmouth in 1610, and Chancellor of the University of Oxford, and Lord Steward of the King's Household, in 1626 ; he died 10th April, 1630. In addition to these dignities, be it remarked, he was a poet, a learned man, and an encourager of learning ; witness his poems, and his benefactions to the University of Oxford, and Pembroke College, named after him. It may therefore be

assumed, since every circumstance is in its favour, that, in the first flow of youth, when the love of poesy, in such a mind, is most strong, he sought out our poet, and proffered his friendship. Yet, let me repeat that the right understanding of these poems by no means depends on the discovery of the person to whom they were addressed; though, while speaking of this youthful, wealthy, and highborn friend of Shakespeare, I shall take the liberty, till better instructed, of designating him Master William Herbert, afterwards Earl of Pembroke.

These neglected and ill-understood (*Sonnet's* contain a clear allusion to events in Shakespeare's life, or rather a history of them, with his own thoughts and feelings as comments on them, and consequently they form a valuable addition to our knowledge of his character.) For this reason I shall spare no pains in a minute investigation, confiding throughout in the interest of his lovers on such a theme. My explanation will, I hope, be satisfactory, while I allow it, for the most part, to go hand in hand with the deductions I may draw. For, in their explanation, I stand not in need of extracts from the writings of his contemporaries, or from any extraneous work whatever. I rely on the *Sonnets* before me, and on them alone, for their natural interpretation.

(In the first place, these *Sonnets* are not, properly speaking, sonnets. A sonnet is one entire poem contained in fourteen heroic lines, of which there are but three in the collection; the two last, and one near the last, which will be explained. The two last intruders, utterly foreign to every thing preceding them, contain

nothing else but repetitions of the same thought,—the stealing of Cupid's brand by a nymph of Diana. The remainder of the sonnets, so miscalled, are POEMS in the *sonnet-stanza*. These poems are six in number; the first five are addressed to his friend, and the sixth to his mistress. This key, simple as it may appear, unlocks every difficulty, and we have nothing but pure uninterrupted biography.)

Owing to their having been always called sonnets, a reader, accustomed to consider a sonnet as a poem complete within itself, is perplexed at finding them connected with each other. If this difficulty is so far overcome as to induce him to read right onward, he is again baffled at the sudden contrariety of subject and feeling, owing to the want of division in the work. He then, it may be, returns to his first idea of a legitimate sonnet, and endeavours to understand them separately; till, finding that mode of reading impracticable, he hurries on in confusion, lamenting that a total disregard to chronological order should have rendered them incomprehensible. In no other way can I account for the wild notions that have been published respecting them. It seems never to have crossed the mind of any one, editor or critic, that they are divisible poems in the sonnet-stanza; though so great a poet as Spenser had, only a few years previously, written his *Visions of Petrarch*, *Visions of Bellay*, *Visions of the World's Vanity*, and *The Ruines of Rome*, all precisely in the same sonnet-stanza.

, About ten years have passed since I sat down with a determination to understand these *Sonnets* fully.

At the time I was offended, and indeed indignant, at meeting with some unworthy strictures on them by an anonymous writer. In common with others, he spoke of them throughout as detached sonnets. As I never had regarded them in any other light than as, for the most part, connected sonnets, I endeavoured to discover if the whole could not, without violence, be divided into separate poems, so that I might arrive at their sense without confusion. To my surprise, while I read them with that intention, (they, as it were, divided themselves, and, still more extraordinary, each poem concluding with an appropriate *Envoy*, to mark their bounds distinctly, and beyond a doubt.)

The excitement at finding a long hidden treasure has passed away,—for a treasure it was, by which I purchased a knowledge of the intention of every sonnet, or rather of every stanza, (I refuse to call them *sonnets* for the future,) delighting myself the more in the poetry, the more I was enabled to comprehend the theme. Now that many years are gone by, I cannot imagine a possible reason for disturbing the divisions I then made, which were as follows:—

(FIRST POEM. Stanzas 1 to 26. *To his friend, persuading him to marry.*

SECOND POEM. Stanzas 27 to 55. *To his friend, who had robbed the poet of his mistress, forgiving him.*

THIRD POEM. Stanzas 56 to 77. *To his friend, complaining of his coldness, and warning him of life's decay.*

FOURTH POEM. Stanzas 78 to 101. *To his*

friend, complaining that he prefers another poet's praises, and reproving him for faults that may injure his character.

FIFTH POEM. Stanzas 102 to 126. *To his friend, excusing himself for having been some time silent, and disclaiming the charge of inconstancy.*

SIXTH POEM. Stanzas 127 to 152. *To his mistress, on her infidelity.*

Such should have been (had the printers in 1609 received efficient directions, and had they done their duty) the order and manner of these poems. The attentive reader will be convinced that these divisions are neither arbitrary nor fanciful, but inevitable. An unsought-for recommendation is that they are thus formed into poems tolerably equal in length, varying from twenty-two to twenty-six stanzas each.)

For upwards of two centuries these poems, owing to the carelessness or folly of those who first committed them to the types, have been little read, or misinterpreted. Yet it is doubtful if their being thoroughly understood will render them popular; though they have many stanzas of wonderful beauty, of excellence, and many passages superior to the best in *Venus and Adonis*, and the *Rape of Lucrece*. Except as connected with Shakespeare, which is much, the subjects are uninteresting. The conceits and forced metaphors, which in his day seem to have been admired, may be forgiven by us; but the languid prolixity and monotony of cadence, pervading almost all the stanzas, are wearisome to modern readers. Besides, we soon cease to delight in the same thoughts, turned round and round, placed in different lights,

and tricked out in quaint fancies. Our ancestors were pleased with this style of writing, it was the fashion of the day; Shakespeare followed it in these poems, and obtained high and highly conceited commendation. "As the soul of Euphorbus," quoth Meres, the *Treasurer of Wit*, "was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in the mellifluous honey-tongued Shakespeare: witness his *Venus and Adonis*; his *Lucrece*; his sugred *Sonnets* among his private friends." Had he, in his poems, as well as in his dramas, "made a pish" at fashion, and followed nature, the poems would also have been "not of an age, but for all time." Even Shakespeare could fail, imitating the style of others. But this, in its best sense, is to his honour; as the more original is a man's genius, to the less effect can it play the ape.

Before we proceed farther, it is necessary to interpret some particular expressions he has used. In his time the language of love or of friendship was the same. His contemporaries spoke of a friendship between those of the same sex by the term of *love*; and the usual address to a friend, as may be seen in their letters, was *lover*. Ben Jonson calls himself, to Dr. Donne, "thy true lover;" he subscribed himself the *lover* of Camden: and in his *Case is altered*, we find,—“Sirrah, there's one of my fellows mightily *enamoured* of thee.” Shakespeare himself publicly dedicated his *love* to the Earl of Southampton; in *Coriolanus* we read,

“I tell thee, fellow, thy general is my *lover* ;”

in fact the phrase was of common parlance. This, has been already explained by Malone, Dr. Drake and others. (Not only did friendship, in poetical and prosaic addresses, adopt the language of love; but, to express its utmost sincerity, it breathed of tenderness. On the other hand, love, eager to free itself from the imputation of transient desire, strove to be assimilated to a pure friendship.) Thus the language of love and friendship became confounded; till fashion, or something worse, endeavoured to separate their terms.

There is another phrase, used by our ancestors, sounding strange to modern ears, which is *sweet*, when applied to a friend. We are accustomed to it among the poetical personages of Shakespeare's plays. Prince Hall calls Poinz "*sweet Ned*;" Antonio begins his letter to his friend with "*sweet Bassanio*;" and the two gentle youths of Verona call each other "*sweet*," and "*sweet Valentine*," and "*sweet Proteus*;" yet many may wonder to find that our poet writes of Master William Herbert's "*sweet respect*," of his "*sweet thoughts*," his "*sweet beloved name*," his "*sweet graces*," and that he even calls him "*sweet love*;" though this last expression was but equivalent to *dear*, or *kind friend*, of the present day; and there was nothing wonderful in any of them at the time it was written. Language is for ever changing, and the language of familiar discourse more than any other. Formerly a gentleman, paying honourable addresses to a lady, might bestow on her the compliment of calling her a lovely *wench*; and he would certainly speak of her as being his *mistress*, which would now be worse than indecorous. If, indeed, the gentleman

of the olden time had spoken of the lady as his *friend*, it would have been more than a suspicious sound (though the appellation is now so innocent) like the *amica* of Terence, the *amica* of modern Italians, or the *amie* of the French.

I had nearly forgotten another change in which Shakespeare is concerned. In these days we talk of the beauty of a woman, a child, a flower, or a painting,—nay, of the beauty of a horse, or a dog, and that continually; but, though we by no means deny there is such a thing as manly beauty, we talk of it under a different name, choosing rather to say of a man that he has a handsome face, or a handsome person,—“Sir, he is the handsomest man in all England.” Yet this word *handsome*, in Shakespeare’s time, had rarely any other meaning than *suitable*, *dexterous*, *clever*; and therefore he, and all his contemporaries, spoke of the good looks of a man under the name of *beauty*.

With these hints of explanation I proceed.

FIRST POEM.

STANZAS I TO XXVI.

TO HIS FRIEND, PERSUADING HIM TO MARRY.

THE arguments used, to this effect, entirely occupy the first sixteen stanzas; then, from stanza 17th to 25th, with the same arguments still introduced, the poet resolves, (in case his friend will not consent to perpetuate the beauty of his youth in his offspring, to make

him live for ever young in verse.) Stanza 26th, and last, is what Spenser would have designated *L'Envoy*.

(This poem, it will be seen, is entire and indivisible; every stanza is connected with the foregoing, and every line is in the same feeling.)

(The chief argument made use of to induce his friend to marry,) is like Viola's address to Olivia :

“Lady, you are the cruel'st she alive,
If you would lead these graces to the grave,
And leave the world no copy.”

In the same strain Venus argues with Adonis :

“Seeds spring from seeds, and beauty breedeth beauty;
Thou wert begot, to get it is thy duty.

* * * *

And so, in spite of death, thou dost survive,
In that thy likeness still is left alive.”)

Those who from experience know how important it is to attend to the breed of cattle, sheep, horses, or dogs; and who are aware in their own persons (others may be excused) that the human race is superior to the bestial, must highly appreciate this part of Shakespeare's philosophy.

(The poem gives its theme in the two first lines,—

“From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,”

and it is followed up by a great variety of compliment and reasoning, particularly that of the honourable pride of being a father.)

Some persons, reading thus far, will be apt to regret that the arguments were not urged to some

Olivia, instead of to his friend. (An answer to this is, and ought to be conclusive, that the Earl of Pembroke's son happened not to be a woman. Women, in their extreme beauty, might lay claim to all our praise, did they not themselves acknowledge manly beauty. As men, in their imagination, formed a Venus, so women formed an Apollo; and when these deities were embodied by the sculptor's art, all equally acknowledged that both were beautiful. It comes to this: either sex has beauty; but neither has a charm except towards the other. The word *charm* settles the question. We all, men and women, acknowledge and admire the beauty of men, women, and children, together with every thing that nature has given excellent in form and feature; but when the charm—the love charm—the charm of sympathy between the sexes—is wanting, it is merely acknowledged and admired. These poems afford us a case in point. Throughout the first five the tenour is,—I delight in you, my friend, therefore I rejoice that you have beauty of person; and I will immortalize that beauty in my verse.) Compare this with the sixth poem, addressed to his mistress, and then we understand the charm. There the whole tenour is,—I delight in your beauty, not in you, for you have deceived me. Besides, we soon get entangled amidst lips, palms, and kisses. Love is no more the steady admiring gentleman that he was; no, he is called, “thou blind fool, love!” the poet talks of being “slain,” and “killed outright with looks.” He owns it to be “sinful loving,” and proves it to be so. He struggles against her enchantments, laments that her beauty has en-

trapped his unwilling love, and calls her a "devil," with many other amorous expressions.)

But, it may be asked, did Shakespeare meanly stoop to flatter an earl's son for personal beauty? Did he seek to make a profit out of the youth, at the expense of turning him into a coxcomb? Not so; public encomiums of this sort were not rare in his days. Nevertheless, it must be owned, he has eulogized the beauty of one of his own sex beyond any other poet; and, doubtless, what he did may be justified. Not content with bestowing common praise, he insists upon it that all the descriptions of "lovely knights," in ancient chronicles, were but prophecies of Master William Herbert; that he has—

"A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted;"

and that Nature first intended him for a woman; but being herself a woman, she "fell a doting on her own work, and made a man of him," much to Shakespeare's displeasure.) In another place he tells him:—

"Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit

Is poorly imitated after you;

On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,

And you in Grecian tires are painted new."

Nothing is put on a par with his beauty, unless it be his truth; while, throughout the poems, he contends that he speaks nothing but what is freely acknowledged by all the world, without a thought of flattery.

We are bound to believe in Shakespeare's sincerity for, in the course of my writing, proofs will be brought forward that he never, in any part of his other works,

(paid a compliment the truth of which could be denied. Just praise is farther removed from flattery than the payment of a debt is from making a gift; for the gift may be serviceable and innocent, while flattery can be neither.) Besides, without reference to a line beyond these poems, I see no difficulty in warding him from the imputation of flattery.

It cannot be imagined that, in the year 1597 or 8, Shakespeare stood in need of a noble patron. At that time, when we are certain that about one half of his plays had been performed, he was high in fame and prosperity, and his true patron was clearly the public. Yet the being admitted to intimacy with a nobleman of Queen Elizabeth's court was, in itself, no slight matter. Without imagining that he felt any paltry pride on such an occasion, it is extremely likely, because it belongs to a good mind, that he felt much complimented. Nothing of a selfish or mercenary description can be conceived, unless in the possibility that the good will and protection of the house of Pembroke, though the youth of the party addressed almost contradicts it, might prove important to the interests of the Blackfriars' Theatre. What could he offer in return for such friendship? (He was powerless, except in verse, and therefore he employed that in celebrating the young nobleman. Had he followed the common, hollow, false style of others, he would have presented him with about fifty lines including every virtue under heaven, and thought he had done enough. He was not of that class. It will be perceived, that though at first, in addition to the youth's beauty, he extolled his worth and his truth, because

he had reason to rely on them, yet afterwards he takes care to draw limits to such praise. This is done tenderly; that is, like a friend, or a father—but still the limits are drawn, and with a boldness beyond what any other author has ventured to use towards the public patron of his fame, if such he may be considered. This conduct proves he was not prompted by the demon of flattery.)

(Then, again, was he to trumpet forth his accomplishments, his talents, his wealth, his birth? No; many others might be equal, many superior to him on all these points. Except in the lines already quoted, (he never directly mentions his wealth and birth. In order, therefore, to place him with truth above his fellows, to make him deservedly eminent, he celebrated him for the beauty of his person, which he contended no one could gainsay.) The lovers of Shakespeare may safely conclude that whatever he did on principle was, and ever will be, worthy of imitation. According to his existing portrait, that Earl of Pembroke must have been, in his youth, remarkably beautiful; and (Shakespeare, swayed by grateful feelings, regarded him as more beautiful than any one who had been, or would hereafter be.) In this spirit he wrote) and however much the ugly may shake their heads, the claim of personal beauty will be ever allowed: it is beyond all other gifts; it necessarily includes health and strength; nobility, riches, and sometimes talents, are trifles compared to its influence; it enforces respect; it commands attention; it is the natural and therefore the best recommendation to the love of women; and to be possessed of it

is the earnest desire of men, whatever they may pretend to the contrary, as well as of women. (There was no flattery in telling the earl's son that he surpassed all others in form and feature, while it was an acknowledged truth; and there was no flattery in attempting to immortalize in verse his beauty more than in a Raffaele or a Titian, when they give us the youth of both sexes glowing in their best looks on the canvas.) There was only the error in hoping that poetry could represent a face like painting. Shakespeare, indeed, does no more than attempt the task; he sees how impossible it is to describe form by words, and contents himself with assuring posterity that his friend was, beyond all other men, excellent in beauty.)

If some passages in these poems should be considered excessive, let it be remembered that the fashion of the day has changed; that the language of gratitude or friendship is strong, and that when uttered by the aid of poetry, it is unconscious of excess. When these compliments were handed about in manuscript among the wits of the age, as we know from Meres they were, they met with no comments on the score of flattery; no reproach was cast on the poet, for attempting to cajole a young nobleman by commending his person. All was then praise; because both the subject and the poetry were in the taste of the day; and because, no doubt, every one knew, that, on this theme, the youth could not be flattered.

My first intention was to paraphrase one of these poems, stanza by stanza, in order to prove its unbroken continuity; and I had fixed on the second,

for the purpose, on account of its superior interest. I have since resolved on paraphrasing all those addressed to his friend, or, it may be called, translating them into plain prose, giving the purport of every stanza, one after the other, and omitting nothing but illustration, or amplification, of the same thought ; in one word, nothing that appears to me essential to the sense. My reasons for this change of intention, are, first : As not one tenth of the editions of Shakespear include his poems, it may readily be imagined that many of my readers have it not in their power immediately to judge for themselves of the correctness of my explanation. And, secondly : Men will not readily accede to an easy and simple solution of what has long been considered a complicated difficulty ; and therefore it is my duty to omit no means that can tend to make myself completely understood. The first poem may be read as follows.

Stanza 1. In order that beauty may never die, we desire offspring from the fairest creatures ; but you, loving none but yourself, are your own enemy. You, that are now the world's fresh ornament, are burying happiness in its bud, and committing waste by parsimony. If you have not pity, you, together with the grave, will deprive the world of its due.

2. Should you be asked, when your youth is no more, where is your beauty ? where your lustihood ? it would be shameful and unavailing to reply,—“ Within my own deep-sunken eyes.” How much more praise-worthy would it be if you could answer,—“ This fair child of mine shall sum up my count, and make my old excuse,”—proving himself your

successor in beauty. This were to be young again in age ; to see your blood warm, when you feel it cold.

3. Look in your glass, and tell your face it is now time there should be a copy formed of it. If that duty is neglected, the world is cheated, and some mother unblessed. For what virgin disdains to be your wife ? What man is so foolish as to permit the love of self to thwart the love of offspring ? Your mother sees herself in you, in the lovely April of her days ; so you, hereafter, in spite of wrinkles, may see yourself as you are now. But if you live and die single, your resemblance is for ever lost.

4. Why is your profitless beauty confined within itself ? Nature gives nothing, but frankly lends to the free ; then, niggard of beauty, why do you not convert her gifts to use ? A miser without usance, why can you not live by the use of such large sums ? You deceive yourself in your own self-love. What account can you render to Nature when she calls you hence ? By not putting your beauty to use, it will die without being your executor.

5. Those hours which nursed you on from infancy, will at length tyrannically wither your fair qualities ; for summer must be led on to winter, and then, if there is no distillation from the summer, all remembrance of it is gone. But flowers distilled lose but their show ; their substance lives sweet in winter.

6. Then allow not winter to come ere your substance is distilled. Before your beauty is withered by time, treasure it elsewhere. Usance is not forbidden, if it makes all parties happy ; that is, to breed another self for yourself ; or, if ten selves for one, you are ten times happier. Then what could death do against you, leaving your posterity ? Be not self-willed, for you are too fair to be subdued by death.

7. Lo ! when the gracious light rises in the east, all men

pay homage ; then, when it climbs, like strong youth, to its height, all adore it still ; but when it declines, like feeble age, it is disregarded ; so none will regard you, if you die childless.

8. Since joy delights in joy, why are you sad when music plays ? If the married unions of music offend your ear, they but sweetly reprove your singleness. Mark ! how one string is in concord with another ; like father, mother, and child, producing together one harmonious song, which seems to tell you, " This you will lose in singleness ! "

9. Is it for fear of making a weeping widow, that you do not marry ? Ah ! if you die childless, the world, widow-like, will wail you, because it possesses not your image, while every private widow has that consolation. If money is wasted, it but shifts its place in the world, for others to enjoy ; but if beauty is wasted, it ends in the world, and is lost. In all this you show no love towards others.

10. For shame ! you seem to own more hate than love, even for yourself. Be changed, that I may change my mind. At least be kind and gracious to yourself ; and for my sake, make another self of yourself.

11. As fast as you wane, your son would grow. The world would be at an end in sixty years, if all were of your mind. Let the ill-favoured perish ; but nature intended that you should leave copies of yourself.

12. When I observe the progress of time, and see every thing decay, I fear lest your beauty should also be destroyed by time ; since nothing but offspring can brave his power.

13. O that you were yourself ! that you would prepare betimes to bequeath your resemblance !—My dear friend, you had a father ; let a son say the same of you.

14. I do not, from the stars, tell fortunes or make

prophecies; but I derive knowledge from those constant stars—your eyes,—signifying that truth and beauty will proceed from you in your progeny, or, failing so, they will both die with you.

15. When I consider how fading and short-lived is every thing, and that you are most rich in youth, while time threatens to change you, I am at war with time.

16. But why do you not make efficient war against time? and fortify yourself in your decay more blessedly than with my barren verse? Many maidens virtuously desire to bear your living image; so should time be defeated better than by my pen.

17. Who would hereafter put faith in my verse, if I were to speak worthily in your praise? The age to come would call it a romance; but were some descendant of yours alive, you would live both in it and in my rhyme.

18. I will not compare you to a summer's day, for that is short-lived, and may be changeable; but your summer shall be eternal, because, so long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, this verse shall make you live.

19. Devouring Time! do whate'er thou wilt, still I forbid thee one most heinous crime;—O carve not with thy hours my friend's fair brow! Yet do thy worst, old Time, my friend shall in my verse live ever young.

20. You, the woman-like master of my heart, have a woman's face; while you excel a woman in mind. You were first created for a woman; till Nature, falling in love with her work, made a man of you; defeating me of you, and making you nothing to my purpose. But since she appointed you for woman's pleasure, let it be so; and mine be your friendship.

21. My muse is not inspired by a counterfeit beauty, and seeking for proud comparisons. O let me, true in

friendship, truly write. Not purposing to sell, I will not overpraise.

22. As long as you remain young, I will believe myself so too ; but when I behold time's furrows on you, I shall look for my death. Since we have exchanged hearts, your beauty must clothe mine in your breast ; then how can I be older than you ? Therefore, friend, be wary of yourself, as I will be wary of myself, not for my own sake, but for your heart, which I bear as charily as a tender nurse her babe. Presume not to have your heart back again, when mine within your breast is dead ;—it was your gift.

23. The strength of my friendship makes me forget the perfect ceremony of its duty. O, let my books be then my eloquent pleaders ! O learn to read what friendship in silence has written ! To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.

24. I have painted your form within me as in a frame, and it hangs in my bosom's shop, which has its windows glazed with your eyes, and the sun delights to peep through them, in order to gaze on you. But eyes picture only what they see ; they know not the heart.

25. Let the fortunate boast of public honours and proud titles, whilst I, debarred of such triumph, joy in that which I looked not for,* and which I most honoured. The glory of great princes' favourites dies at a frown ; the painful conqueror, once foiled, is quite razed from the book of honour, and all his services are forgotten ; then happy I, that can know no change in the friendship I feel, or in that which is felt for me.

26. L'ENVOY.

“ Lord of my love ! to whom in vassalage,
Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit,

* This is evidence that the noble youth had sought an acquaintanceship with Shakespeare, and proffered his friendship.

To thee I send this written embassy,
To witness duty, not to show my wit.
 Duty so great, which wit so poor as mine
 May make seem bare, in wanting words to show it;
 But that I hope some good conceit of thine
 In thy soul's thought all naked will bestow it;
 Till whatsoever star that guides my moving,
 Points on me graciously with fair aspect,
 And puts apparel on my tatter'd loving,
 To show me worthy of thy sweet respect.
 Then may I dare to boast how I do love thee;
 Till then, not show my head where thou may'st prove
 me."

This long continuous compliment certainly affords us no hint of an anecdote in his life. It is, however, the prologue of events to come. Meres, full of artificial conceits, must have rejoiced in some of these stanzas, especially the twenty-fourth. Thus may a great mind, even that of Shakespeare, be utterly disguised by clothing itself in other men's approved fancies.

SECOND POEM.

STANZAS XXVII TO LV.

TO HIS FRIEND—WHO HAD ROBBED THE POET OF HIS
 MISTRESS—FORGIVING HIM.

HERE is a curious change of subject. While these high compliments were paid in verse to manly beauty, the poet's mistress added a still higher one. She allured the youth into an approval of her inconstancy ;

and, what was worse, into a forgetfulness of his own ties of friendship. The wiles and cheats of love, when we are not the sufferers, generally provoke our laughter ; possibly because we are more apt to sympathize with the winners than the losers. With a spice of malice it would be easy to draw a picture of this intrigue, so as to throw a large portion of ridicule on Shakespeare ; but I am withheld, as I observe not only the acuteness of suffering in the loser, but also in one of the winners.

We can scarcely imagine Shakespeare in a fit of rage ; such, however, was the fact. He was stung to the quick ; and his resentment, though we are ignorant of the manner in which it was shown, appears to have been ungovernable. He alludes to it in this poem with deep regret :

“ I may not evermore acknowledge thee,
Lest my bewailed guilt should do thee shame.”

These lines, no doubt, were intended to be vague. I could merely offer a guess at their meaning, were it not that the quarrel is referred to in the fifth poem, where the interpretation of “ *bewailed guilt*,” is complete.

“ O benefit of ill ! now I find true
That better is by evil still made better ;
And ruin'd love, when it is built anew,
Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.
So I return rebuked to my content,
And gain by ill, thrice more than I have spent.

• “ That you were once unkind befriends me now,
And for that sorrow, which I then did feel,

Needs must I under my transgression bow,
 Unless my nerves were brass or hammer'd steel ;
 For if you were *by my unkindness shaken*
 As I by your's, you've passed a hell of time ;
 And I, a tyrant, have no leisure taken
 To weigh how once I suffer'd in your crime.
 O that our night of woe might have remember'd
 My deepest sense, how hard true sorrow hits !
 And soon to you, as you to me, then tender'd
 The humble salve which wounded bosom fits !
 But that your trespass now becomes a fee ;
Mine ransoms yours, and your's must ransom me."

Stanzas 119 & 120.

"And soon to you, as you to me," &c. inform us also, that it was not long before a reconciliation took place. Taking the words exactly in their order, they imply that Shakespeare was the first to write ; but this second poem seems to have been written in answer to his friend, who had expressed sorrow for the fault he had committed, even, as we read in stanza 34, to tears. This sorrow instantly disarmed Shakespeare of his anger.

Throughout his works, it may be observed, there is ever a ready pardon for those who, tempted by opportunity, or swayed by prejudice, become criminals from a want of strength of mind, provided they are sensible of their faults, and lament them. Such was his charity, to which Dr. Johnson could "not reconcile his heart," as he himself has confessed, in his remarks on the young Count of Rousillon, that sinner Bertram. There is a case in point in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, one of his earliest plays, if not his first : Pro-

teus attempts, by treachery and mean artifices, to deprive Valentine of his mistress; yet when his "shame and guilt confound" him, when he entreats forgiveness, and expresses his hearty sorrow, the generous Valentine, without a moment's pause, exclaims,

" Then I am paid,
And once again I do receive thee honest.
Who by repentance is not satisfied,
Is nor of heaven, nor earth ; for these are pleased ;
By penitence the Eternal's wrath appeased."

And in the *Tempest*, one of his latest works, as well as in some intervening ones, we meet with the same sentiment :—

" Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,
Yet with my nobler reason, 'gainst my fury
Do I take part : the rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance : they being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown farther. Go, release them, Ariel."

It is delightful, in this "rarer action," so hard of attainment, to discover that an author has practised what he taught. There was, it is true, a reasonable inducement to his forgiveness, if rage can hearken to reason. He had discovered that his mistress was the more to blame of the two ; that she had solicited the youth, (see stanza 41 to him, and the poem addressed to her) and therefore his guilt was less than it might have been. In one respect, the poet surpasses his own Valentine in generosity ; for no sooner is his heart at peace with his friend, than he reproaches himself for the bitter resentment he had shown. Whatever it

was, he reflects on it with anguish, and almost thinks it a sufficient ground for their lasting separation. Judging from his expressions, we are led to conjecture that his resentment had been public. /

Continually has it been lamented that we know almost nothing of our poet's life; yet here we have an event in it, on which we can rely, described by his own hand, with many attending circumstances, every one of which exemplifies his character; and together they form a tale of interest, the like of which, among the biographies of other great men, poets or not, we may seek in vain. This is fresh from the well-spring of truth in his own bosom. To learn how any man, whose genius we reverence, might have acted in his trying situation, would excite that species of curiosity which is commendable;—a desire to be more intimately acquainted with his mind and his character, by a knowledge of the working of his passions. Here, at the first glance, we find the deeply philosophic poet giving loose to a storm of anger, like one of the common herd, as if philosophy were vain indeed. But this proceeded from the animal portion of his being,—no more. Nor is this conduct wanting in useful speculation. His usual epithet, given by his personal friends, was the *gentle*; and we must believe he was rarely otherwise, never except under a stinging provocation; and it may tend to prove that strong passions, however subdued, will be found among the hidden attributes of genius. On the other hand, let us view him, soon as his “nobler reason” had overcome the animal within him, acting up to the dictates, or beyond them, of his own philo-

sophy; not simply and coldly forgiving—a most virtuous effort in the estimation of many,—but kind, affectionate, seeking excuses for the wrong he had endured, and heart-struck at the recollection of his resentment. This looks like something not altogether man, as man is used to exhibit his nature. How he joys in the return of friendship!

As in this second poem he describes himself far more than in any of the others, it is worthy of the minutest examination. Its chief characteristics are gentleness, tenderness, and sincerity. The poem was written when he was distant from London, possibly during one of his journeys to Stratford; because as will be seen, it is mentioned he was travelling on horseback, and that it was his intention to return.

Stanza 27. Though we are distant from each other, I think of you so much, that I can find no repose after the toil of the day. Unable to close my eyes, I fancy, in the darkness, that you are at my bed-side.

28. Thus worn by night as well as by day, I find no rest.

29. When I lament my fate, if by chance I think on you, I am happy.

30. When I grieve at past misfortunes, the thinking of you restores my losses and ends my sorrows.

31. All those friends, whom I have supposed dead, lie hidden in you. All that they had of me is yours; and I view their beloved images in you.

32. If you survive me, and should once more read these lines, preserve them, not for their excellence, but as a memorial of my friendship.

33. Alas! I had rejoiced but one hour in the sunshine of early morning, when the clouds came over me.

34. You, like the sun, promised a beauteous day, leaving me unprotected against the clouds. It is not enough that you break through the clouds to shine on me again. If you heal my wound, you cure not my disgrace; nor can your shame be my comfort. Though you repent, my loss is the same. Your sorrow for having offended me still leaves me to suffer the consequences of your offence. Ah, but the tears you shed enforce me to forgive you!

35. No more reproach yourself. Al' things and all men have faults; and I, the offended one, excuse the sin you have committed.

36. It may be that, friends as we are, we ought never to meet again. Such a separation will not harm our friendship, but it will rob us of happiness. Perhaps I must not openly acknowledge you, lest the resentment I showed, which I bitterly lament, should be remembered to your shame; nor may you, in your kindness, publicly honour me, lest the honour of your name should suffer. That cannot be; as, loving you truly, I feel that your character, like yourself, is mine.

37. I take all my comfort in your worth and truth. Whatever you possess of beauty, birth, wealth, or wit, I, by engrafting my friendship on you, partake of all, and of all your glory. Wishing you every thing that is best, I am ten times happy in seeing my wish fulfilled.

38. While you live, my muse can never want a worthy subject.

39. But how can I, with propriety, sing of one who is the better part of myself? In praising you, shall I not also praise myself? It may therefore be better that we should live divided, in order that, by not being confounded together, I may do you justice. This will alleviate the pain of absence.

40. Take all I love ; you had all, before you took her. If you love her for my sake, I cannot blame you ; if otherwise, I shall. Gentle thief, I forgive your robbery ; though you have stolen all my property ; and though it is harder to bear a wrong from love than an injury from hate. Kill me, by your blandishments towards her, with spiteful thoughts ; yet we must not be foes.

41. The licence you give yourself, forgetting me the while, well befits your youth and beauty, for temptation follows you every where. You are gentle, therefore apt to yield ; you are beauteous, therefore to be wooed ; and when a woman woos, what woman's son will deny her ? Ah me ! but yet you should forbear, and chide your beauty and your straying youth, when they lead you, in their riot, to break not only your faith to me, but her's.

42. I am grieved that you have her, for I loved her dearly . but it is a worse loss, through her means, to be deprived of you. I would fain excuse you both, by saying that my friend loves her for my sake, and that she loves you because you are my friend. If I lose you, it is her gain ; and the loss of her is my friend's gain. But my friend and I are one ; so I may sweetly flatter myself that she still loves me, and no other.

43. I see you in my dreams at night ; how much more happy should I be to see you by day !

44. If I could move as quick as thought, I would instantly conquer this distance between us ; but I must wait in sadness for time's leisure.

45. I am for ever sending my thoughts and wishes in tender embassy. They, swift messengers, return with news of your fair health ; yet I am not content.

46. My eye and my heart have been contending for which has the greatest share in you ; and it is determined

that my eye has a right to your picture,* that is, your outward appearance, and my heart to your friendship.

47. Thus my eye, possessed of your form, and my heart of your friendship, I still have you with me, in spite of the distance between us.

48. How careful I was, when I set out, to place each trifle under lock and key; but I left you, to whom my jewels are trifles, a prey to every vulgar thief, and I fear you may be stolen from me.

49. If ever that should happen, and you, upon more advised consideration, should frown on my defects, pass by, and scarcely look on me, I here, beforehand, declare that you may lawfully leave me, since I can produce no reason for your loving me.

50. How heavy is a journey away from a friend! My horse plods dully on, as if he knew, by some instinct, that his rider loved not speed when leaving you.

51. What excuse will my poor beast find on my return, when the wind itself will not be swift enough?

52. This absence will but increase my pleasure in seeing you.

53. How comes it you are surrounded by so many admirers? Your beauty is like that of Adonis, or of Helen,

* This and the following stanza would almost lead us to conclude that he really had his friend's *picture*. I believe nothing more is meant than his *outward form*. Proteus, speaking of Silvia, uses the word in the same sense,

“ ’Tis but her *picture* I have yet beheld.”

This part of the poem is full of conceits, once, no doubt, wondered at for their wit and elegance. In the two preceding stanzas the author is composed of the four elements: his body is earth and water; his thoughts and wishes are air and fire; then when he sends his air and fire on an embassy, his earth and water “sink down to death, oppressed with melancholy!”

or of the spring, as your bounty is like harvest time ; but
your best quality is constancy of heart.

54. How much more beauteous is beauty when accompanied by truth ! When your youth and beauty shall fade, your truth shall live in my verse.

55. L'ENVOY.

“ Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
 Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme ;
 But you shall shine more bright in these contents
 Than unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time.
 When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
 And broils root out the work of masonry,
 Nor Mars's sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn
 The living record of your memory.
 'Gainst death, and all oblivious enmity,
 Shall you pace forth : your praise shall still find room,
 Even in the eyes of all posterity,
 That wear this world out to the ending doom.
 So till the judgment that yourself arise,
 You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.”

This *Envoy* is in the extreme. There are several other passages, to the same effect, in these poems ; they will merit consideration, when speaking of his love of fame. In this instance, it may be argued that the boast of the poet is subservient to the compliment he is paying. For the rest, the lines may last “to the ending doom ;” but how strange it is that the immortalized personage himself should, in a few short years, have been utterly unknown as their subject, and have remained for about two centuries an object of un-availing research ! Many may contend he is still uncertain ; but, though I think my proofs are suffi-

ciently strong, I do not insist upon them, because they are of minor importance.

My sole gratification in giving to Shakespeare a warm friendship for Master William Herbert, rests on the fact that when Earl of Pembroke, he is known to have been the worthiest, the most accomplished, and perhaps the most elegantly learned nobleman of his day. A tradition exists in the family, that, when supposed dead from apoplexy, his arm sprung up at the moment the knife was employed in the preparation for embalming his body, and then, an instant after, he died. /

THIRD POEM.

STANZAS LVI TO LXXVII.

TO HIS FRIEND, COMPLAINING OF HIS COLDNESS, AND WARNING HIM OF LIFE'S DECAY.

SUCH a friendship as this between the Earl's son and Shakespeare, was not, according to Bacon, uncommon in his time. "There is," he tells us in his *Essays*, "little friendship in the world, and least of all between equals, which was wont to be magnified. That that is, is between superior and inferior, whose fortunes may comprehend the one the other." We now consider an approach to equality in rank and fortune as necessary to the union of minds; and this poem, together with the two succeeding ones, tends to confirm the modern doctrine, and, according to Bacon, that of more ancient times.

Soon after the reconciliation, the youth evinced a coldness towards his friend. It may be that he could not forgive himself so frankly as he had been forgiven; and that therefore the sight of a man, whom he had injured, was painful, perhaps humbling. But it seems more probable, without going to history for his character, he was of a good and generous nature, though, at his age, of a volatile disposition; and, highly situated as he was by birth, in danger of being spoiled by the flattery of the world.)

(In the three first stanzas Shakespeare complains of this coldness. Those marked 57 and 58 are what I before noticed as evidence of the person addressed being a man of rank. Reproach is conveyed more forcibly, and, at the same time, with more kindness, in their strained humility, than it would have been by direct expostulation.

“ Being your slave, what should I do but tend
 Upon the hours and times of your desire ?)
 I have no precious time at all to spend,
 Nor services to do, till you require.
 Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour,
 Whilst I, my sovereign, watch the clock for you,
 Nor think the bitterness of absence sour,
 When you have bid your servant once adieu ;
 Nor dare I question with my jealous thought,
 Where you may be, or your affairs suppose,
 But, like a sad slave, stay and think of nought,
 Save, where you are how happy you make those :
 So true a fool is love, that in your will
 (Though you do anything) he thinks no ill.
 “ That God forbid, that made me first your slave,
 I should in thought controul your times of pleasure,

Or at your hand the account of hours to crave,
 Being your vassal, bound to stay your leisure !
 Oh, let me suffer, (being at your beck,)
 The imprison'd absence of your liberty,
 And patient, time to sufferance, bide each check,
 Without accusing you of injury.
 Be where you list, your charter is so strong,
 That you yourself may privilege your time ;
 Do what you will, to you it doth belong,
 Yourself to pardon of self-doing crime ;
 I am to wait, though waiting so be hell,
 Not blame your pleasure, be it ill or well."

(After this complaint of his seeming indifference, it is only once more referred to, in stanza 61st.

"From me far off, with others all too near."

And the remainder of the poem is filled with compliments, and assurances of unaltered affection, mixed with warnings of the fleeting nature of youth,—exemplified in the poet himself, now passed his best days, and looking forward to age and death.)

(At the time of writing this poem, he must have been, according to my calculation, about five and thirty. His description of himself would, at first sight, represent him much older, particularly in stanza 73rd.

"That time of year thou may'st in me behold,
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
 Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
 In me thou seest the twilight of such day,
 As after sunset fadeth in the west,
 Which by and by black night doth take away,
 Death's second self, that seals up all in rest."

This is true as contrasted with the fresh youth of his friend ; and thus it is explained in the two lines immediately following :

“ In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie.”

But we shall better understand it when we recollect that most men, perhaps all, after having well mastered thirty years, are extremely sensitive to internal reflections on their mortality. At that period we are conscious of having lost the bloom of life and the blithe alacrity of youth ; and we are startled at the thought of crows' feet at our eyes, with other hard and woful signs, which must shortly be our's. At forty, we are reconciled to all this ; at fifty, we look forward to sixty ; and so on, till we look back on five and thirty as the prime of manhood. Old Pantaloon, in one of Goldoni's comedies, exclaims,—“ O, I feel like a young man of forty !”)

In stanzas 69th and 70th, he mentions his having heard his young friend's conduct blamed. This he supposes a slander, yet counsels him to beware of giving a likelihood to such talk. This is as unlike flattery as a father's advice to his son.

L'Envoy to this poem is curious. It appears that the poem was written in a book, leaving some blank leaves, which Shakespeare recommends his friend to occupy with his “ mind's imprint.”

Stanza 56. Renew thy strength, sweet friendship ; and let it not be said thou art wearied. Do not, my friend, kill, with cold looks, the soul of kindness ; and may this

sad interim be called by some loved name, unlike estrangement.

57. What should I do but, in all obedience, attend upon you at your own hours, without regard to myself? Nor can I presume to guess at your affairs, or where you may be.

58. God forbid I should imagine any restraint on your liberty! My duty, as your vassal, is patience, without a murmur. Whatever I may suffer while absent from you, it is my part to await your pleasure.

59. If everything which exists has existed before, would I could open a record, a thousand years old, and see what was said of you in ancient times!

60. Time by degrees destroys what he bestows; yet, in despite of time, I will celebrate your worth to posterity.

61. When your image breaks my rest, is it yourself, in spirit, that haunts me, to discover if I continue to bear you in my mind? O no! your friendship, though much, is not so great. It is my fear of losing you that keeps me wakeful.

62. In spite of my glass, showing me in the wane of life, I am full of self, because I regard my young friend as my own self.

63. When my friend's youth and beauty shall fade, and when, like me, he shall be crushed and o'erworn by time, this verse shall preserve him as he is.

64. While I observe the destruction or change of every thing by Time, I reflect that Time also will take away my friend; the thought of which is as death.

65. Since the power of Time, over the strongest substances, is irresistible, what can beauty, weaker than a flower, expect? It cannot survive, unless in verse.

66. Tired of beholding the corruptions of this world, I would fain die, were it not that I must leave my friend alone.

67. Ah ! wherefore should his presence grace corruption ? Why should he live, now nature is disfigured, unless it be that she keeps him as a sample of the wealth she once possessed ?

68. She shows him, to mark the distinction between beauty and its artful counterfeit.

69. Foes, as well as friends, speak of the perfection of your outward form ; yet their praise is confounded when they guess at the qualities of your mind. The cause is this,—you associate too much with many.

70. The slander of others shall not harm you. On the contrary, while you remain good, it will but prove your worth the more. Your having long escaped censure, is no security for the future ; and your power in the world might be too great, were you believed faultless.

71. Mourn not for me when I am dead ; forget the hand that writes these lines ; for, in my friendship, I desire you may never feel sorrow. But, should you remember me, forbear to speak my name, lest you be reproached with my unworthiness.

72. O, rather than you should be reproached, may I, dear friend, be utterly forgotten !—unless you can devise some virtuous untruth in my favour. But no, nothing that seems false must come from you.

73. My youth is past, and I journey on towards age and death ; therefore, since I may leave you ere long, your friendship, aware of this, is the stronger.

74. But be content ; these lines, the better part of me, will remain when I am no more.

75. As food to life, or sweet-seasoned showers to the ground, your friendship is to me. Sometimes I enjoy it to the full ; at other times I am bereaved of it.

76. Why is my verse, contrary to the fashion of the day, so unvaried ? Know, kind friend, I always write of you, and I can only repeat my estimation of you.

77. L'ENVOY.

" Thy glass will show thee how thy beauties wear, *
 Thy dial how thy precious minutes waste;
 The vacant leaves thy mind's imprint will bear,
 And of this book this learning may'st thou taste.
 The wrinkles which thy glass will truly show,
 Of mouthed graves will give thee memory;
 Thou by thy dial's shady stealth may'st know
 Time's thievish progress to eternity.
 Look, what thy memory cannot contain,
 Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find
 Those children nursed, delivered from thy brain,
 To take a new acquaintance of thy mind.
 These offices, so oft as thou wilt look,
 Shall profit thee, and much enrich thy book."

Whether the advice contained in this *Envoy* was or was not followed, is of no importance; but it certainly was the occasion of a counter-gift of a memorandum-book, possibly too fine a one for use, since we read, in stanza 122nd, that such a gift had been made, and that the poet had bestowed it on another; for which he is compelled, as we read in that stanza, to make a complimentary excuse:

" Thy gift, thy tables-
 That poor retention could not so much hold,
 Nor need I tallies, thy dear love to score;
 Therefore *to give them from me* was I bold,
 To trust those tables that receive thee more:
 To keep an adjunct to remember thee,
 Were to import forgetfulness in me."

FOURTH POEM.

STANZAS LXXVIII TO CI.

TO HIS FRIEND, COMPLAINING THAT HE PREFERS ANOTHER
POET'S PRAISES, AND REPROVING HIM FOR FAULTS
THAT MAY INJURE HIS CHARACTER.

Who this rival poet was is beyond my conjecture ; nor does it matter. We perceive many intimations that he owed his preferment to flattery. Accordingly Shakespeare, in this poem particularly, disclaims such unworthiness ; asserting that he praises his friend for nothing but what all men, friends and foes, freely acknowledged. His personal beauty, which the newly favoured poet was also celebrating, he had ever made the chief subject of eulogy, as none could contradict it. Even when it became, at the time of his mistress's falling in love with it, a curse to himself, he still continued to do it justice, and, in his magnanimity, paid it equal or greater compliments while suffering from its influence. Farther, to point out how different he is from a servile poet, and to prove his honesty, he now blames the youth for his faults, excusing himself for interference by reminding him that a stain on his character affects a friend. The faults he notices are those of licentious conversation, and fickleness in his friendship. His sharpest reproof for the latter fault is in these lines :—

“ Farewell ! thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough thou know'st thy estimate ! ”

The reproof for the other fault, is given with a pater-

nal love. It is contained in stanzas 94th, 95th, and 96th. Only imagine them, with *Dr. Chalmers*, addressed to old *Queen Elizabeth* ! I give them for their excellence, and in illustration.

“ The summer flower is to the summer sweet,

Though to itself it only live and die ;

But if that flower with base infection meet,

The basest weed outbraves his dignity ;

For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds ;

Lilies that fester, smell far worse than weeds.

“ How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame,

Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,

Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name !

O, in what sweets dost thou thy sins enclose !

That tongue that tells the story of thy days,

Making lascivious comments on thy sport,

Cannot dispraise but in a kind of praise :

Naming thy name blesses an ill report.

O what a mansion have those vices got,

Which for a habitation chose out thee !

Where beauty's veil doth cover every blot,

And all things turns to fair that eyes can see !

Take heed, dear heart, of this large privilege ;

The hardest knife ill-used doth lose its edge.

“ Some say thy fault is youth, some wantonness ;

Some say thy grace is youth and gentle sport ;

Both grace and faults are loved of more or less ;

Thou mak'st faults graces that to thee resort.

As on the finger of a throned queen

The basest jewel will be well esteem'd ;

So are those errors that in thee are seen

To truths translated, and for true things deem'd.

How many lambs might the stern wolf betray,

Like a lamb he could his looks translate !

How many gazers might'st thou lead away,
 If thou would'st use the strength of all thy state !
 But do not so ; I love thee in such sort,
 As thou being mine, mine is thy good report."

In this place I ought to refute the story of our poet's being lame. It rests, I conjecture, on the authority of some matter-of-fact gentlemen, who could not comprehend a metaphor. In stanza 37th he says, he is "*made lame* by fortune's dearest (direst?) spite;" therefore he is lame in his foot. But if such gentlemen insist on discarding figurative language, it is strange they did not observe, a few lines after, that he also says, " So then I am *not lame*," which ought to set him on his legs again without a halt. Then we have here in stanza 89th :—

" Say that thou dost forsake me for some fault,
 And I will comment upon that offence ;
 Speak of my *lameness*, and I straight will halt,
 Against thy reasons making no defence."

That is,—*call me lame, and I, to make your words good, will pretend to be so.* Had he really been lame this would have lost its point ; and the promise of "making no defence" would have been ridiculous. Besides, these four lines are immediately preceded by—

" Such is my love, to thee I so belong,
 That for thy right myself will bear all wrong."

It is therefore, strongly as words can imply it, certain that to call him *lame* would be a *wrong* done to him. That he excelled in performing the parts of old men may well have been, without his halting. But how,

with halting, could he have played the Ghost in *Hamlet*, which we are told was his best performance? As the story may be traced to these poems, so is it refuted by them. Sir Walter Scott introduced Shakespeare, a speechless figure, into his *Kenilworth*, apparently for no other purpose than the pleasure of calling him "a halting fellow." "He is a stout man at quarter-staff, and single falchion, though, as I am told, a halting fellow."

The *Envoy*, like that to the second poem, contains a promise of immortal fame, in an address to his muse.

Stanza 78. You have so often embellished my verse, that many others follow my example. Ignorant writers learn something, and the learned double the majesty of their lines from you. Yet be most proud of my verse, inspired by you alone.

79. Whilst I was your only poet, you favoured me; but now I must yield to another. I grant, kind friend, you merit a worthier pen than mine; but what your present poet appears to invent in your praise, whether it be virtue or beauty, is nothing more than a reflection of yourself. Therefore thank him not.

80. I might despair, while you listen to a better poet, were it not that your worth is like the ocean, and can bear a saucy bark as well as a vessel of tall building and goodly pride. Should I be cast away, my friendship is to blame.

81. One of us must survive the other. In either case you cannot be forgotten, though I may; because your monument shall be my gentle verse, to be o'erread (such virtue hath my pen) by eyes not yet created.

82. I grant you were not constrained to listen to me as your only poet, since I might prove inefficient. Listen

therefore to others ; yet beware of their gross painting, and call to mind your truth-telling friend.

83. I never perceived that embellishment was necessary for you ; therefore have I been some time silent, to prove how much you exceed written compliment. This should be considered in my favour. One of your fair eyes is worth more than the praise of both your poets.

84. None can say more than,—“ You alone are you !” The poorest writer may become rich on such a theme. You add a curse to your beauteous blessings by being fond of praise.

85. My tongue-tied muse restrains herself ; and while others write good words, I think good thoughts. Still agreeing with their praise, I consider you are my friend, and therefore I ought to hold the first rank.

86. Was it the grandeur of his verse in your praise, or his superior genius, that silenced me ? No ; neither he, nor his night companions, giving him aid, nor that affable familiar spy,* who every night deceives him with intelligence, caused my silence ; but I lacked matter, when I lacked your countenance.

87. Farewell ! you are too dear for my possessing, and like enough you know your value. You can be mine only by favour, not by my desert. You may, perceiving your error, withdraw your friendship, making it but a happy dream to me.

88. When you shall be disposed to hold me in disesteem, I will, for your sake, and therefore for my own, second every thing you may speak in my dispraise.

89. To all faults imputed by you I will plead guilty ;

* These allusions to the now forgotten rival poet are vague and unavailing. Nothing can be traced from them towards his discovery.

and I will avoid your presence, ceasing to remind the world of our former acquaintanceship.

90. If you must hate me, hate me now,* while fortune is my enemy. Let the loss of you make other petty griefs light, and not follow them.

91. Some glory in one thing, some in another ; I in you alone. Having you, my happiness would surpass that of all others, did it not depend on your constancy.

92. Your friendship will last through my term of life. This is a happiness ; but you may be false, and I not know it.

93. Thus may I, like a deceived husband, live on supposing you are true. I shall never perceive the change in your face, since that is fated to express nothing but kind love.

94. They that have power to do evil by their conversation, yet are not inclined to it themselves, have, in their right of power, a command over appearances. Yet be mindful of this,—lilies that fester, smell far worse than weeds.

95. How spotted is the beauty of your budding name by your licentious speech ! How are your vices veiled by your fair qualities ! Dear friend, be heedful, or you are lost.

96. Some excuse your faults ; and truly you can convert faults into graces. But do not so ; for, like yourself, your good report belongs to me.

97. In your absence the passed summer seemed to me like winter, and the autumn poor in its abundance.

* Like other men, he must have had his disappointments and vexations, even in what appears to us his splendid career towards fame. Though, in the original stanza, he uses the word "sorrow," he certainly could not hint at the death of his son ; because, only a few lines farther on, he calls that "sorrow"—"*petty griefs*." Besides, his only son died in 1596.

98. I have been absent from you during the spring,
when nothing could afford me delight.

99. Then I accused every flower of having stolen either
its sweetness or its colour from you.

100. Whither, my Muse, art thou gone, forgetful of thy
duty? Return, and redeem thy ill-spent hours. Gaze on
my friend, and if in him appears Time's spoils, satirize his
power, and give my friend fame faster than he can waste life.

101. L'ENVOY.

" O truant Muse, what shall be thy amends
For thy neglect of truth in beauty dyed?
Both truth and beauty on my love depends;
So dost thou too, and therein dignified.
Make answer, Muse: wilt thou not aptly say,—
*Truth needs no colour, with his colour fixed,
Beauty no pencil, beauty's truth to lay;
But best is best if never intermixed.*
Because he needs no praise wilt thou be dumb?
Excuse not silence so: it lies in thee
To make him much outlive a gilded tomb,
And to be praised of ages yet to be.
Then do thy office, Muse; I teach thee how
To make him seem long hence as he shows now."

FIFTH POEM.

STANZAS CII TO CXXVI.

(TO HIS FRIEND, EXCUSING HIMSELF FOR HAVING BEEN SOME
TIME SILENT, AND DISCLAIMING THE CHARGE OF
INCONSTANCY.

IN the three first poems we see tenderness and integrity expressed, for the most part, in monotonous lines;

the sentiment often disguised in conceits. The fourth is far less objectionable; but the fifth is full of varied, rich, and energetic poetry. As we know that three years had elapsed between the first and the fifth, it is highly interesting to observe his improvement in rhymed versification, and his gradual abandonment of the fashion of the day. Few will differ from me when I say it is to be regretted that he ever departed from blank verse in his plays. He himself was doubtless of this opinion, for he seldom penned even a couplet in his latest plays. Ease, harmony, strength, and pregnancy of meaning, all so wonderfully his attributes, often seemed to forsake him when he wrote in rhyme, at least in the heroic measure.

(He opens this poem with an elegant apology for his silence.) The stanza is one of the best he has written.

“ My love is strengthen'd, though more weak in seeming ;
 I love not less, though less the show appear ;
 That love is merchandised, whose rich esteeming
 The owner's tongue doth publish every where.
 Our love was new, and then but in the spring,
 When I was wont to greet it with my lays ;
 As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
 And stops her pipe in growth of riper days :
 Not that the summer is less pleasant now
 Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
 But that wild music burthens every bough,
 And sweets, grown common, lose their dear delight.
 Therefore, like her, I sometimes hold my tongue,
 Because I would not dull you with my song.”

As he had been accused, in addition to his silence,

of giving a preference to new acquaintances, he exults in these evidences of the youth's friendship, repeatedly calling him "fair, kind, and true," and declaring his own sincerity. He talks more than usual of himself, as if he were assured of the youth's being interested in him, and even calls to mind their old quarrel as a matter of triumph to both parties.

For some time I was baffled in discovering the meaning of stanza 121; the only real difficulty I have encountered in these poems. He there mentions he had been accused of something "vile;" complains that on his "frailties" there have been "frailer spies," and strenuously rebuts the charge. The word *frailties* naturally sent my thoughts on his mistress, but as he says, speaking of his calumniators:

"Which in their wills count bad what I think *good*,"

of course he had not her in his mind, as, in other passages, he condemns himself for having had any acquaintanceship with her. It follows then it must have been something else which was esteemed "vile;" and, connecting the stanza with the preceding and following ones, we find he had been pronounced guilty of the *vileness of frailty in friendship*,—a phrase used in the same sense also in stanza 109. His reasoning on this subject is likewise obscure, and might be mistaken to his discredit:

"'Tis better to be vile, than vile esteem'd :

When not to be receives reproach of being ;
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deem'd,
Not by our feeling, but by others' seeing."

My interpretation will be seen. (He owns he had been long absent, that he had "frequent been with unknown minds," and that he had "forgot upon his dearest love (friend) to call," but still contends he was heartily attached to him. After reminding him of the cordiality of their reconciliation in times past, he utterly denies that he had been so "vile" as to be fickle in friendship. Immediately after this stanza, he acknowledges having given his present of a memorandum book, "thy gift, thy tables," to another, (which, we may suppose, was ranked among his offences) and handsomely excuses himself for having parted with it. Then he exclaims :

"No ! Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change !"

and continues in the same strain to the end of the poem.)

Nothing appears to have distressed him more than evil tongues. We have seen how sensitively he warned his friend, in his light conversation, to beware of them. His hatred of the profession of a player is grounded on the reproach cast on it by the world. This is bitterly and powerfully expressed in these lines :

"Alas ! 'tis true I have gone here and there,
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gored mine own thoughts." * * * *

"O for my sake, do thou with fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide,
Than public means, which public manners breeds.

*Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
 And almost thence my nature is subdued
 To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.
 Pity me then." * * * **

"Your love and pity do the impression fill
Which vulgar scandal stamp'd upon my brow ;
 For what care I who calls me well or ill,
 So you o'ergreen my bad, my good allow ?
 You are my all-the-world, and I must strive
 To know my shames and praises from your tongue."

Had he been the best actor of his day, he might have found a sufficient consolation in making himself a "motley to the view;" and we may readily imagine that his regret was mingled with some indignation at players not being worthily esteemed; which at the present day they are, by inheritance from him, as well as on their own account. We are told that, on the stage, he was "excellent in the qualitie he professed," and "an actor of good account in the companie;" by which we may understand he was an excellent actor of second-rate parts. His name stands in the list of the principal tragedians to Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*, performed in 1603; but it appears in no list of a later date. This was thirteen years before his death. It is probable that he gradually withdrew his person from the stage, as the fame and profits of his works increased.

As he had given in this poem a reason for not addressing more verses to his young friend, the *Envoy*, without actually bidding him farewell, seems to take a poetical leave of him; and, to mark it the more, it is written, not in the sonnet-stanza, but in half-a-dozen couplets.

Stanza 102. My friendship is far from being disproved by silence. When we first knew each other, I wrote in your praise ; and if I sometimes now refrain, it is because your praise is become common, and I would not make you weary of my verse.

103. O blame me not if I should write no more, since your merits exceed the power of my muse.

104. To me, fair friend, you will always appear the same as when first I saw you fresh in youth, you that are yet young. Beauty fades unperceived ; therefore I would celebrate it betimes.

105. Let not my friendship be called idolatry, since my beloved friend is fair, kind, and true to me.

106. Old chroniclers, in their descriptions of human beauty, did but prefigure you.

107. No consideration can controul my true friendship. In spite of death itself, I shall live in this verse, and it shall be your enduring monument.

108. What can I say more than I have already said in your praise ? Nothing, dear boy ; but still it must, like prayers divine, be repeated daily, so that our friendship may seem always young.

109. O never say that absence made me fickle. I return unchanged. Never believe anything against me so preposterous.

110. Alas ! it is true I have gone here and there, a public player, goring my own thoughts ; and it is most true that I have formed new acquaintances, but not to your injury ; nor shall my conduct again try the patience of an older friend.

111. O for my sake chide guilty fortune for not having provided me with better means than those which depend on the public. Thence is my name disgraced, my nature is well nigh humiliated to my situation. But if you pity me, dear friend, I shall find comfort.

112. Your friendship and pity make amends for what vulgar scandal has stamped upon me. I am deaf to critic or flatterer, so you palliate my bad, and allow my good.

113. Since I left you, everything, in my mind's eye, has appeared in your shape.

114. Has my eye been flattered, or has it seen truly? O, it was flattery! Yet, in this instance, I have a kingly love for it.

115. Was I wrong in saying from the first—*Now I love you best!*—thus subduing the tyranny of Time, by proclaiming a certainty over uncertainty?

116. Let me not admit impediments to the union of true minds. Friendship is insincere, if capable of change when it meets with change. O no! it is fixed, never shaken, a guiding star, and not the fool of Time.

117. Accuse me of having been remiss in my duty by not calling on you, say I have frequented others' company instead of yours, record my wilfulness and errors, and add surmise to proof; but hate me not for putting your constancy and the virtue of your friendship to trial.

118. As we stimulate our appetites by compounds, or as we make ourselves sick with physic to avoid a worse sickness, such was the policy of my friendship. I find, however, that the drugs I took for your sake are considered poison.

119. What wretchedness was once mine when I thought we were separated for ever! O benefit of ill! now I find that which was more than good may be bettered by evil, and renewed friendship is stronger and greater than it was at first.

120. Your former unkindness befriends me now, and I must bow under my transgression, occasioned by the sorrow I then felt. For if you were shaken by my unkindness, as I by your's, you have passed a hell of time. I have never sought to canvass the crime you committed.

O that I had then thought otherwise than I did ! But we soon mutually exchanged forgiveness, and we are the richer for it.

121. A man that is slandered, is in a worse state than if his enemies spoke the truth ; inasmuch as he does not enjoy those advantages, which, according to them, his bad conduct has acquired. Why should slanderers count bad what I think good ? No ; *I am that I am !* and they who point out my defects, betray their own.

122. Your gift of tablets I bestowed on another, because I stood not in need of anything to keep you in my memory.

123. Time, with his pyramids, which are but deceptions on us, because our lives are short, shall not boast of my change.

124. If my dear friendship were but the child of state, it might be called fortune's bastard, subject to circumstances, and built on accident ; but it is neither affected by smiling pomp, nor by misfortune. It fears not policy ; it stands alone, unbiassed, and is itself, in the grand sense, politic.

125. How should I have profited by obsequiousness, laying a wrong foundation for fame ? Have I not seen courtiers lose all, and more, by paying too much ? No ! let my unmixed and artless homage be to your heart, and let your heart be mine in exchange. Hence, thou suborned calumniator of my sincerity ! A true soul, when most impeached, stands least in thy power.

126. L'ENVOY.

“ O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power
Dost hold Time's fickle glass, his sickle, hour ;
Who hast by waning grown, and therein show'st
Thy lovers withering as thy sweet self grow'st :

If nature, sovereign mistress, over wrack,
As thou gost onwards, still will pluck thee back,
She keeps thee to this purpose,—that her skill
May time disgrace, and wretched minutes kill.
Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure !
She may detain, but not still keep her treasure :
Her audit, though delayed, answered must be ;
And her quietus is to render thee."

The task of interpreting the sense of all these stanzas, has been effected carefully and honestly. Indeed, this is no self-praise, as they contain nothing adverse to my explanation, no temptation to strain the meaning of a single sentence. My purpose is not to set forth and uphold an ingenious theory—a mere opinion,—but to bring forward undeniable proofs, enforcing conviction.

At the same time, I am far from believing that every person will precisely coincide in all the interpretations I have given. Better readings, though unimportant to the whole, may be made of some of the passages. It would be strange if no one disagreed with me on so many minor disputable points. But allowing every objection of that nature, I contend that the main points must remain undisturbed, which are these :

First ; The *Sonnets*, as they have hitherto been called, up to the 126th inclusive, evidently ought to form five distinct poems in the sonnet-stanza.

Secondly ; Each poem terminates at the place I have indicated, with its proper *Envoy*.

Thirdly ; Each stanza is connected with the preceding and the following ones, so as to produce con-

secutive sense and feeling throughout, as much, or more, as will be usually found in any poetical, or even any prose epistle.

Fourthly ; They are all addressed to one person ; and that person must have been very young, and of high rank ; if not Master William Herbert, some other of his age in 1597 or 8, and of his condition.

Fifthly ; Each poem is entitled to the description or argument prefixed to it.

Our poet's lovers, once convinced on these several points, which is my aim, will readily understand and enjoy this neglected portion of his works. While proceeding in the explanation, my endeavour has been, far as the nature of the poems permitted, to make them a comment on the author's character. In doing this, however, I have omitted to notice numerous touches, because they must be observable to every attentive reader.

Taking a general view of the poems, the predominant peculiarity is in the variety, ingenuity, and almost ideal painting displayed in their lengthened strain of elegant compliment ; and this question inevitably intrudes itself,—is it probable that he wrote all, as he asserts, in the spirit of honest truth ? Granting that this high-born youth was eminently beautiful, as well as kind-hearted and true, at least in Shakespeare's belief, with one exception, which was forgiven, at the commencement of their friendship, we shall find that, amidst all this continued praise, he is not endowed by the poet with any quality beyond beauty, kindness, and truth,—“ fair, kind, and true,” being the burthen of the song throughout. No prophecy of the future

excellence of his mind is admitted ; his birth and wealth are scarcely mentioned, never celebrated ; the hopes of the nation are faintly and indirectly hinted at, not assured ; all these have ever been the common themes for flattery of the great, and were very common in those days : Shakespeare avoids them all. It may be argued that so much praise of personal beauty, whether merited or not, amounts to flattery ; and the answer may be,—if merited, there was no flattery, as I have already endeavoured to prove. But the question ought to resolve itself into this consideration ; either the youth is to be regarded simply as a friend, or as a patron. If as a friend, we cannot find fault with him for celebrating the most worthy qualities he perceived ; first, truth, and, next to that, personal beauty. If as a patron, the poet was assuredly a wretched courtier, openly reproving the noble youth for having committed the “ crime,” such is the plain term, of treachery to his friend ; for having been addicted to licentious conversation ; and for having delighted in the “ gross painting” of another poet, in preference to honest praise :

“ Thou, truly fair, wert truly sympathized
In true plain words, by thy true-telling friend.”

It must follow that, if Shakespeare, with all his knowledge of the human heart, intended to flatter a patron, he betrayed more ignorance of the means to accomplish his end than the dullest slave. Such a conclusion is an absurdity.

SIXTH POEM.

STANZAS CXXVII TO CLII.

TO HIS MISTRESS, ON HER INFIDELITY.

ALL the stanzas in the preceding poems are retained in their original order; the printers, without disturbing the links, having done no worse than the joining together of five chains into one. But I suspect the same attention has not been paid to this address to his mistress. Indeed I farther suspect that some stanzas, irrelevant to the subject, have been introduced into the body of it. For instance, stanzas 135th and 136th, containing a string of puns upon his own name, Will, may very well have been addressed to his mistress prior to her infidelity, but they are contradictory to his resolution to leave her for ever. If it be urged that he is constantly, as in these stanzas, confessing his love for her in spite of her infidelity, I answer that it is no more than the confession, by no means in a playful mood, of an acknowledged weakness, which he is resolute to overcome; the whole tenor of his confession being,—

“Love is my sin, and my dear virtue hate,—

Hate of my sin, grounded on sinful loving.”

However he may waver, and, for the moment, seem to return to his former thralldom, indignation at her faithlessness, and at her having been, through treachery, the cause of his estrangement from a friend, at the last completely conquers his “sinful loving.” In the concluding stanza he leaves her in the bitterest

language that could be framed for the occasion. On this account, the stanzas containing the puns on his name, appear to me out of keeping with the rest, being altogether of too playful a character.

Stanza 145th strangely comes upon us in the octosyllabic measure ; and stanza 146th is an address to his own soul, the solemn nature of which cannot be regarded as congruous with the rest. These two stanzas should be expunged from the poem. It is remarkable that they are placed exactly where there seems to have been a pause or division ; the first part being written in doubt and jealousy, and the after part in certainty of the woman's infidelity. Another division of the same kind may indeed be pointed out ; and both, or the three parts, taken together, may be well likened to the struggles and love, each overcoming the other by turns, till finally such love is utterly destroyed as worthless. But the octosyllabic stanza, and the address to his soul which follows, can, neither of them, for different reasons, belong to the poem.

Allowing these exceptions, the poem may be read with a tolerable continuity of feeling, possibly as much as the subject will admit. It is a stormy feeling, buffeted to and fro, and presents an admirable picture of pain and distraction, caused by an almost overwhelming passion for a worthless object.

The stanza, containing the anatomy of an evil passion, is perfectly in its place. I give it as a masterpiece, and as a specimen of grand moral writing. It speaks fearfully home to the worst part of our nature :—

"The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
 Is lust in action; and till action, lust
 Is perjured; murderous, bloody, full of blame,
 Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
 Enjoy'd no sooner, but despised straight;
 Past reason hunted; and no sooner had,
 Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait,
 On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
 Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
 Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
 A bliss in proof,—and proved, a very woe;
 Before a joy proposed; behind a dream:
 All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
 To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell."

I repeat that the two sonnets, printed at the end, about Cupid and a nymph of Diana, belong to nothing but themselves. This poem must have been written just before the *second* one to his friend; or soon after, in dramatic retrospection.

I fear some readers may be surprised that I have not yet noticed a certain fault in Shakespeare, a glaring one,—his having a mistress, while he had a wife of his own, perhaps, at Stratford. May no persons be inclined, on this account, to condemn him with a bitterness equal to their own virtue! For myself, I confess I have not the heart to blame him at all,—purely because he so keenly reproaches himself for his own sin and folly. Fascinated as he was, he did not, like other poets similarly guilty, directly or by implication, obtrude his own passions on the world as reasonable laws. Had such been the case, he might have merited our censure, possibly our contempt. On the contrary, he condemned and subdued his fault, and may therefore be cited

as a good rather than as a bad example. Should it be contended that he seems to have quitted his mistress more on account of her unworthiness than from conscientious feelings, I have nothing to answer beyond this: I will not join in seeking after questionable motives for good actions, well knowing, by experience, that when intruded on me, they have been nothing but a nuisance to my better thoughts.

DID HE VISIT ITALY ?

ABOUT the period of his writing the first, or the two first poems to his friend, (for both might have been written without much intervening time) or a few years previous to his production of the *Merchant of Venice*, did he visit Italy ?

In order that my examination of this question may be appreciated according to its bare merits, and no more, in fairness I commence by stating that nothing can uproot my belief of his having been there ; a belief grounded on a variety of internal evidence, which I shall point out in the works he produced after 1597. Consequently the reader may regard every thing urged as matter brought forward to establish a favourite theory ; though, in justice to myself, let me declare that I am unconscious of a wish to omit or weaken any circumstance tending to invalidate the evidence.

If in the judgment of others, capable of judging, this belief should be pronounced reasonable, it would add an interesting portion to his biography, explain some allusions in his writings hitherto not understood,

and account for his Italian phrases, as well as for his increased knowledge of Italian geography.

A few years since, it might have been contended, agreeably to the general opinion, that he had not sufficient means for travelling, unless towards the close of his life. Here, again, we have to express our obligation to Mr. Collier for the following facts, supported by irrefragable documents, brought to light by him. When Shakespeare was only in his twenty-sixth year, in November 1589, he was one of the sixteen shareholders, the twelfth on the list, in the Blackfriars Theatre. Seven years after this, when that theatre was to be repaired, his name had risen to the fifth on the list; and he was also, together with his partners at Blackfriars, one of the shareholders in the Globe Theatre, at Bankside. In seven years more his name stood the second on the list, in a patent granted by James the First. In 1608, when he was forty-four years old, the Blackfriars Theatre was valued, owing to the City of London's having proposed to purchase it; and he then possessed no less than four shares, each rated at £233. 6s. 8d. together with the whole (as is stated) of "the wardrobe and properties," for which he asked £500. All this amounts to £1,433. 6s. 8d. possibly a larger sum than could have been obtained had he sought to sell the property, though he values the yearly profit of each share at no more than seven years' purchase. But if we calculate it at only one half of his estimate, and reckon the value of money as five times increased since that period, his theatrical property alone was worth, in our present money, £3,583. 6s. 8d. Besides

this, however, which we learn from other documents, he had previously paid off a mortgage of forty pounds on his mother's property; he had made a purchase of a small messuage, with barn, garden, and orchard, at Stratford, for sixty pounds; he had bought 107 acres of land in or near that borough for £320 (equal to £1,600 at present); he had given £440 (equal to £2,200 at present) for a lease of a moiety of the tithes at Stratford; and it is also conjectured he had lent money on mortgage. From this statement it will be seen he was possessed of nearly eight thousand pounds of our present value, a proof at once of his prosperity and prudence from the time he first arrived in London; especially if we consider he had a wife and children to support, and probably parents and their children to assist; for we may well believe the clearing a debt of forty pounds on his mother's property was not a solitary proof of his affection towards them. I am delighted to bring forward these proofs of the reward bestowed on his genius;*

* Three papers, parts of this volume, were read at the Plymouth Institution. I was stopped in the middle of this sentence, and startled from the deep silence, so strictly observed in the hall during the reading of a paper, by a sudden and unanimous burst of joy, every hand at once echoing my delight with applause. Those gentlemen, many of whom are scientific rather than literary, who carefully weigh their words and regulate their conduct when they meet for the purpose of mutual instruction, here gave way, much to their honour, to an uncontrollable, generous impulse. The biographers of Shakespeare had it not in their power, till lately, of affording this grateful information to so great an extent. I trust that those of my readers, who were ignorant of it, will receive it as joyfully as my fellow members at the Institution.

there is enough in them to prove that he might have well and wisely afforded the expense of a visit to Italy as early as 1597, the year before the *Merchant of Venice* was entered at Stationers' Hall. Lest a doubt should be entertained on this essential point, I need only mention that in a letter extant from one of his townsmen, Mr. Richard Quiney, we find Shakespeare, so early as 1597-8 was enabled to purchase land in his own county, and was talked of as an influential person in Stratford.

In the second place, no one can imagine that he was not desirous to see the most interesting country, certainly of his time, in Europe,—indeed the only interesting one for literature and the arts. Add to which that country was the scene of some of his plays; and possibly he might have been criticized for a want of local knowledge in them, which he desired to avoid for the future.

And in the third place, it was not an uncommon thing, among his contemporaries, to take a trip to Italy, particularly to Venice. It was rather a matter of complaint that so many gallants visited Venice, to the peril of their home-bred manners and morals. Many instances to this effect might be produced. Among the rest, Ben Jonson satirizes the English travellers to Venice in his *Volpone*, and our poet himself, in *As you like it*, makes Rosalind say, "Look you lisp, and wear strange suits; disable all the benefits of your own country; be out of love with your nativity, and almost chide God for making you that countenance you wear; or I will scarce think you have swum in a gondola."

Thus, having shown there was no hindrance of any nature to such a journey, but, in all likelihood, a strong inducement, I proceed to show he was in Italy from the internal evidence of his works; and I begin with his *Taming of the Shrew*, where the evidence is the strongest.

This comedy was entirely rewritten from an older one by an unknown hand, with some, but not many, additions to the fable. It should first be observed that in the older comedy, which we possess, the scene is laid in and near Athens, and that Shakespeare removed it to Padua and its neighbourhood; an unnecessary change, if he knew no more of one country than of the other.

The Dramatis Personæ next attract our attention. Baptista is no longer erroneously the name of a woman, as in *Hamlet*, but of a man. All the other names, except one, are pure Italian, though most of them are adapted to the English ear. Biondello, the name of a boy, seems chosen with a knowledge of the language,—as it signifies a little fair-haired fellow. Even the shrew has the Italian termination to her name, Katharina. The exception is Curtis, Petruccio's servant, seemingly the housekeeper at his villa; which, as it is an insignificant part, may have been the name of the player; but, more probably, it is a corruption of Cortese.

Act I, Scene 1. *A public place.* For an open place or a square in a city, this is not a home-bred expression. It may be accidental; yet it is a literal translation of *una piazza pubblica*, exactly what was meant for the scene.

The opening of the comedy, which speaks of Lombardy and the university of Padua, might have been written by a native Italian.

“Tranio, since—for the great desire I had
To see fair Padua, nursery of arts,—
I am arrived for fruitful Lombardy,
The pleasant garden of great Italy.

* * * * *

Here let us breathe, and happily institute
A course of learning, and ingenious studies.”

The very next line I found myself involuntarily repeating, at the sight of the grave countenances within the walls of Pisa;—

“Pisa, renowned for grave citizens.”

They are altogether a grave people, in their demeanour, their history, and their literature, such as it is. I never met with the anomaly of a merry Pisan. Curiously enough, this line is repeated, word for word, in the fourth act.

Lucentio says, his father came “of the Bentivolii;” this is an old Italian plural; a mere Englishman would write “of the Bentivolios.” Besides, there was, and is, a branch of the Bentivolii in Florence, where Lucentio says he was brought up.

But these indications, just at the commencement of his play, are not of great force. We now come to something more important; a remarkable proof of his having been aware of the law of the country in respect to the betrothment of Katharina and Petruchio, of which there is not a vestige in the older play. The father gives her hand to him, both parties consenting,

before two witnesses, who declare themselves such to the act. Such a ceremony is as indissoluble as that of marriage, unless both parties should consent to annul it. The betrothment takes place in due form, exactly as in many of Goldoni's comedies :

"Baptista. * * Give me your hands ;
God send you joy, Petruchio ! 'tis a match.
Gremio & Tranio. Amen ! say we ; we will be witnesses."

Instantly Petruchio addresses them as "father and wife ;" because, from that moment, he possesses the legal power of a husband over her, saving that of taking her to his own house. Unless the betrothment is understood in this light, we cannot account for the father's so tamely yielding afterwards to Petruchio's whim of going in his "mad attire" with her to the church. Authority is no longer with the father ; in vain he hopes and requests the bridegroom will change his clothes ; Petruchio is peremptory in his lordly will and pleasure, which he could not possibly be, without the previous Italian betrothment.

Padua lies between Verona and Venice, at a suitable distance from both, for the conduct of the comedy. Petruchio, after being securely betrothed, sets off for Venice, the very place for finery, to buy "rings and things, and fine array" for the wedding ; and, when married, he takes her to his country house in the direction of Verona, of which city he is a native. All this is complete ; and in marked opposition to the worse than mistakes in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, which was written when he knew nothing whatever of the country.

The rich old Gremio, when questioned respecting the dower he can assure to Bianca, boasts, as a primary consideration, of his richly furnished house :

“ First, as you know, my house within the city
Is richly furnished with plate and gold ;
Basins and ewers, to lave her dainty hands ;
My hangings all of Tyrian tapestry :
In ivory coffers I have stuff’d my crowns,
In cypress chests my arras, counterpoints,
Costly apparel, tents, and canopies ;
Fine linen, Turkey cushions ’boss’d with pearl,
Valance of Venice gold in needlework ;
Pewter and brass, and all things that belong
To house, or housekeeping.”

Lady Morgan, in her *Italy*, says, (and my own observation corroborates her account) “ there is not an article here described, that I have not found in some one or other of the palaces of Florence, Venice, and Genoa—the mercantile republics of Italy—even to the ‘Turkey cushions ’boss’d with pearl.’” She then adds: “ This is the knowledge of genius, acquired by the rapid perception and intuitive appreciation,” &c.—never once suspecting that Shakespeare had been an eye-witness of such furniture. For my part, unable to comprehend the intuitive knowledge of genius, in opposition to her ladyship’s opinion, I beg leave to quote Dr. Johnson: “ Shakespeare, however favoured by nature, could impart only what he had learned.” With this text as our guide, it behoves us to point out how he could obtain such an intimate knowledge of facts, without having been, like Lady Morgan, an eye-witness to them.

In addition to these instances, the whole comedy bears an Italian character, and seems written as if the author had said to his friends,—“Now I will give you a comedy, built on Italian manners, neat as I myself have imported.” Indeed, did I not know its archetype, with the scene in Athens, I might suspect it to be an adaptation of some unknown Italian play, retaining rather too many local allusions for the English stage.

Some may argue that it was possible for him to learn all this from books of travels now lost, or in conversation with travellers; but my faith recoils from so bare a possibility, when the belief that he saw what he described, is, in every point of view, without difficulty, and probable. Books and conversation may do much for an author; but should he descend to particular descriptions, or venture to speak of manners and customs intimately, is it possible he should not once fall into error with no better instruction? An objection has been made, imputing an error, in Grumio's question, are the “*rushes strewed?*” But the custom of strewing rushes in England, belonged also to Italy; this may be seen in old authors, and their very word *giuncure*, now out of use, is a proof of it. English christian names, incidentally introduced, are but translations of the same Italian names, as Catarina is called Katharina and Kate; and, if they were not, comedy may well be allowed to take a liberty of that nature.

Let us now turn to the *Merchant of Venice*, who is a merchant of no other place in the world. Every thing he says or does, or that is said and done about

him, except when the scene changes to Belmont, is throughout the play, Venetian. Ben Jonson, in his *Volpone*, gives no more than can be gathered from any one book of travels that has ever been published; nothing but the popular notion of the city. Shakespeare, in addition to the general national spirit of the play, describes the Exchange held on the Rialto; the riches of the merchants; their argosies

“ From Tripolis, from Mexico, and England;
From Lisbon, Barbary, and India:”

some with “silks” and “spices,” “richly fraught;” he represents “the trade and profit of the city” as consisting “of all nations;” he talks familiarly of the “masquing mates,” with their “torch bearers” in the streets; of “the common ferry which trades to Venice,” where Portia is to meet Balthazar, after he has delivered the letter to Doctor Bellario, at Padua, the seat of law; and

“ In a gondola were seen together
Lorenzo and his amorous Jessica.”

All this is written with perfect knowledge of the place. So magical is the painting, that a lover of Shakespeare, as he enters Venice, looks about him with the air of a man at home, and almost expects to see some merchants talking with a Shylock on the Rialto, till he spies the poverty of the people, and sighs to himself,—“Alas! how changed since the days of the Republic!” Shakespeare might have read of the “strict court of Venice,” on commercial questions, and of the reasons for such strictness; he

might also have found authority in books for—" You have among you many a purchased slave:" but where did he obtain his numerous graphic touches of national manners? where did he learn of an old villager's coming into the city with "a dish of doves" as a present to his son's master? A present thus given, and in our days too, and of doves, is not uncommon in Italy. I myself have partaken there, with due relish, in memory of poor old Gobbo, of a dish of doves, presented by the father of a servant.

Should it be conjectured that the Italian tale in the *Pecorone*, from which this play was taken, may contain sufficient information for this circumstantial writing, I answer that it is barren of any hint of Venetian manners; so barren, that, while the scene is at Venice, it might be any where else, for it was written by a Florentine, who seems to have known nothing of the city beyond its name.

In *Othello* is the same preservation of manners and customs, but nothing in addition to what is already noticed. The first act alone is in Venice. Not one of the annotators has attempted to give a reason why Cassio, the Florentine, is called in derision by Iago "a great arithmetician," and "a counter-caster," with his "debtor and creditor;" but there is a good reason. A soldier from Florence, famous for its bankers throughout Europe, and for its invention of bills of exchange, book-keeping, and everything connected with a counting-house, might well be ridiculed for his promotion, by an Iago, in this manner. But it may be said, Shakespeare needed not to go farther than Lombard-street for this information. True; and every

fact, taken singly, may possibly be accounted for ; but the many facts, all correctly given, form the marvel.

The scene of *Much ado about Nothing* is at Messina. If Dogberry and Verges should be pronounced nothing else than the constables of the night in London, before the new police was established, I can assert that I have seen those very officers in Italy, France and Russia ; and doubtless they are to be found at Constantinople,—unless among the Turks there are no petty dogs in office, at once self-sufficient, pompous, and ignorant. Nothing in this Sicilian comedy is of a contradictory nature.

There is no other Italian play, by our poet, which I consider to have been written after 1597, except the *Tempest*, and the characters in it are sufficiently national. As this is one of his last plays, if it could be proved there is a topographical error in it, (as is insinuated by Henley, in a note to a passage, misunderstood by him, in *Othello*) I grant that my arguments are much weakened. The note says, “Shakespeare’s acquaintance with the topography of Italy, (as appears from the *Tempest*) was very imperfect.” In vain have I looked for the imperfection ; nor can I guess in what passage it was imagined, unless in Prospero’s account of his having been forced from Milan to the sea, the annotator assuming that the poet believed Milan was a sea-port. He neither wrote so, nor ought any one to be impressed with such a notion. The passage referred to may be this :

“*Prospero.*Whereon,
A treacherous army levied, one midnight
Fated to the purpose, did Antonio open

The gates of Milan ; and, i' the dead of darkness,
 The ministers for the purpose hurried thence
 Me, and thy crying self. * *

* * *

In few, they hurried us aboard a bark ;
 Bore us some leagues to sea ; where they prepared
 A rotten carcase of a boat," &c.

Prospero was hurried from Milan, and also hurried aboard a bark ; but no distance is specified, nor is it necessary. . A man may be hurried from Portsmouth to the sea, or from Paris to the sea at Marseilles. State-prisoners, in close carriages, are hurried to this day, for hundreds of miles, across Italy, as I myself have witnessed. But this is not all ; a common mode of reaching the sea from Milan, is to travel by land merely to Piacenza, and thence in a bark, down the wide, deep, and rapid Po. So plain is either of these methods, that I am still in doubt if I rightly interpret Henley's critical note ; but I can find no other peg whereon to hang it.

Thus much on the Italian plays written after 1597. I believe that the three remaining were written before that date.

All's well that ends well. This comedy is ascribed to the year 1598 or 9, by the Chronologers, on no authority whatever. To me it appears, from its general character, an earlier work by some years. Here the third and fourth acts are chiefly at Florence. The expression "beside the port" of course means "beside the gate ;" otherwise it is a sad error ; but Helena, as a pilgrim, going to the shrine of the "great Saint Jacques," is strange enough ; and such names

s Escalus and Corambus are very unlike his after Italian names.

Romeo and Juliet, an early play, contains nothing more of Italian manners than can be found in the English poem, from which it is taken, of *Romeus and Juliet*. Here we have another Escalus; an odd corruption, I conjecture, of Della Scala, the real prince, according to Bandello and Da Porto.

As for the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, it tends to show more strongly than the two last mentioned, that Shakespeare, before 1597, knew not Italy as it appears he did afterwards; and that the intuitive knowledge of genius by no means belonged to him.

His knowledge of the language has been denied. A question on this subject properly appertains to a consideration of the extent of his learning, of which I am about to treat; but it will be of more service in this place.

Dr. Farmer thus speaks of the Italian words introduced into his plays: "Their orthography might lead us to suspect them to be not of the writer's importation." Whose then, with bad orthography? I cannot understand this suspicion; but perhaps it implies that the words, being incorrectly printed, were not originally correct. The art of printing was formerly far from being so exact as at present; but even now, I beg leave to say, I rarely meet with an Italian quotation in an English book that is correct; yet I can perceive plainly enough, from the context, the printer is alone to blame. In the same way I see that the following passage in the *Taming of the Shrew*, bears evident marks of having been correct, before it was

corrupted in the printing of the first folios, and that it originally stood thus :

“ *Petruchio*. Con tutto il core ben’ trovato,—may I say.

Hortensio. Alla nostra casa ben’ venuto, molto onorato signor mio Petruchio.”

These words show an intimate acquaintance with the mode of salutation on the meeting of two Italian gentlemen; and they are precisely such colloquial expressions as a man might well pick up in his travels through the country. My own opinion is that Shakespeare, beyond the power of reading it, which is easily acquired, had not much knowledge of Italian; though I believe it infinitely surpassed that of Stevens, or of Dr. Farmer, or of Dr. Johnson; that is, I believe that, while they pretended to pass an unerring judgment on his Italian, they themselves must have been astonishingly ignorant of the language. Let me make good my accusation against all three. It is necessary to destroy their authority in this instance.

Stevens gives this note in the *Taming of the Shrew*: “ *Me pardonato*. We should read, *Mi pardonate*.” Indeed we should read no such thing as two silly errors in two common words. Shakespeare may have written *Mi perdoni*, or *Perdonatemi*; but why disturb the text farther than by changing the syllable *par* into *per*? It then expresses, instead of *pardon me*,—*me being pardoned*, and is suitable both to the sense and the metre,

“ *Me perdonato*,—gentle master mine.”

Dr. Farmer says,—“ When Pistol ‘cheers up himself with ends of verse,’ he is only a copy of Hanniball

Gonsaga, who ranted on yielding himself a prisoner to an English captain in the Low Countries, as you may read in an old collection of tales, called *Wits, Fits, and Fancies*,

‘ Si fortuna me tormenta,
Il speranza me contenta.’ ”

This is given as Italian, not that of the ignorant Pistol, nor of Shakespeare, but of Hanniball Gonsaga ; but how comes it that Dr. Farmer did not look into the first few pages of a grammar, to teach him that the lines must have been these ?

Se fortuna mi tormenta,
La speranza mi contenta.

And how could he corrupt orthography (a crying sin with him) in the name of Annibale Gonzaga ?

Upon this very passage Dr. Johnson has a note, and, following the steps of Sir Thomas Hanmer, puts his foot, with uncommon profundity, in the mud. He says ;—“ Sir Thomas Hanmer reads : *Si fortuna me tormenta, il sperare me contenta*, which is undoubtedly the true reading, but perhaps it was intended that Pistol should corrupt it.” Perhaps it was ; but “ undoubtedly ” the Doctor in his “ true reading,” containing five blunders in eight words, has carried corruption too far.

There is not much Italian in Shakespeare’s works, and possibly, as I have said, he did not know much more, though his century was very favourable to its study. When he wrote *Hamlet*, we may presume he knew nothing of the language, simply on account of his making Baptista the name of a woman, an error

he could otherwise have scarcely committed, and which he corrected in a later play.

The commentators having settled, to their own satisfaction, that he was quite ignorant of Italian, contended that his fables could not be derived from any of the *Novellieri*, unless they had proof of a translation of the same existing in his time. Thus they have sought every where for hints in English whereby he might have formed the fable of *The Merchant of Venice*, because that tale in the *Pecorone* was not then translated ; though, for very many reasons, it is well nigh impossible he could have taken it from any thing but that tale. If, as they confess, no published translation existed of it in his time, then one must have been made expressly for him, or, what is more probable, he read it in the original.

To my mind there is farther reason for believing that he read Italian. The fable of the *Tempest* may be ascribed to his own invention, since no similar tale is known. This I believe ; yet, in my fancy, there is a shadowing forth of it in the Milanese history ; and I am not aware of any part of that history having been translated in his time. It is true no historical event is engrafted on the romance ; but Lodovico Sforza, ambitious to reign, resolved on the destruction of his inert nephew, the lawful duke Giovanni Galeazzo. Compare this with the usurpation of Antonio over the reigning duke Prospero, absorbed from public affairs in his books. But Lodovico, not daring in the city to “set a mark so bloody on the business,”—Prospero’s words,—gave his nephew a lingering poison, and then led him away to Pavia to

die. Again, there is much in these annals of the political alliances between the courts of Milan and Naples. Add to this, at the period of the usurpation of the Milanese duke Lodovico Sforza, there was a Ferdinand, King of Naples, son of Alfonzo, (Shakespeare calls him Alonso); and Ferdinand's son, though not himself, as in the *Tempest*, married a princess of Milan. This is what I mean by the shadowing forth of a romance from history.

Assured that he visited Italy, I give him, in my imagination, with some reasons on which to rest, a direct line of travel from Venice, through Padua, Bologna, and Florence, to Pisa. I do not say he forbore to go a little out of his way to visit Verona, the scene of his own *Romeo and Juliet*, nor that he did not even see Rome; but I have no grounds for such a supposition.

Should my arguments be unavailing with my readers, I have, at any rate, made known his wonderful graphic skill in representing to the life Italian characters, and Italian manners and customs,—solely from books and hearsay.

Before I take leave of this period of his life, I must notice, in addition to the fact of his having paid off the debt on his mother's property, and the probability of his having assisted his impoverished father, the coat of arms obtained by him or through his means, from the herald's office. I look upon it as an act of filial affection, a gratifying distinction to the old man among his townsmen after his misfortunes—a trophy of his son's fame and prosperity. We may be assured

he was not permitted to stand in need, in any way, of more solid advantages ; and indeed we know he ceased to be poor as his son became rich. Yet have I read of this coat of arms as an evidence of Shakespeare's vanity and presumption,—nay, of worse ! Dr. Lardner unfeelingly strains every nerve to make us believe it was obtained by “falsehood,—a falsehood too glaring to be supported ;” and concludes with these irreverent words,—“Altogether the affair is discreditable to the father, to the poet himself, and to the two kings at arms.” Dr. Lardner should have stated a clearer case, and not one built on assumptions, and supported by a confusion of documents, before he ventured on such language—ungrateful in every sense. It is possible that Shakespeare himself, as a land-proprietor in his native county, desired to hold this distinction of a gentleman, for such a heraldic instrument was of incomparably more importance to him than it is to any one in these days ; but I always regard it as a testimony of love towards his father, in whose name it was made.

HIS LIFE, FROM 1600 TO 1616.

DURING this period, from the age of six-and-thirty till his death, all we read tends to prove that his days were passed in uninterrupted happiness. Not that I can imagine he was, at any time after his arrival in London, painfully struggling against misfortune of any kind. On the contrary, every thing we know of him is of a nature to contradict the vulgar notions that a poet must necessarily pass the prime of his life in poverty—that he is not duly acknowledged while he lives—or he is a profligate, or strangely deficient in worldly wisdom, or ever suffering under a feverish excitement from envious criticism. Yet, by an unaccountable perversion, unless it be that writers presume on the absence of direct information, or that there is a secret satisfaction, in some minds, to decry the apparent happiness of our superiors, it is certain that Shakespeare has been represented as a most unenviable being.

From his various biographers we gather, by consulting them together, that he was prosperous only when about to leave the world, that his fame was

nothing while he lived, that a powerful host, headed by Ben Jonson, incessantly assailed, and with effect, his popularity, and that his moral character will not endure examination. The facts of his having purchased land at the early age of thirty-three, and that in ten years more, he had amassed what may be called a fortune, establish his co-existing popularity beyond a doubt. Nor was he merely popular with the multitude, but admired by the most brilliant wits, and favoured at both the royal courts of his time, so that he must also have been, what is termed, a fashionable poet; for Ben Jonson, once erroneously styled his detractor, speaks of his "flights,"

"That so did take Eliza and our James!"

The unruffled progress of his days, his exemption from misfortune, his tranquillity, in some measure may account for the little public notice that was taken of a man so high in fame. It appears to have been foreign to his nature to enter into literary turmoils, and thrust himself into notoriety. He was unwilling to disturb and endanger his happiness; such was his wisdom. A man, once in the temple of fame, should beware of descending among the crowd in its precincts.

While speaking on the several subjects belonging to the purpose of this volume, it is useless to promise impartiality; perhaps such a promise was never yet kept. All I can engage to avoid, is unfounded panegyric, and the willing concealment of any thing which might injure the groundwork of my arguments. Should I assume more than my authorities allow, or attempt to deduce inconsequences, my error will be apparent.

My enjoyment has been ever to regard him with affectionate homage, and, if possible with unalloyed admiration. If any of my chance readers, instead of his lovers, should prefer the view that has been formerly taken of him and his works, especially during the last century, let him proceed no farther with me. For the rest, opinions are of every possible shade on every possible question; and I cannot particularly recommend my own, except that they are to pleasant minds the pleasantest.*

* When I had proceeded thus far, a friend informed me that, to the best of his recollection, an article had appeared in the *London and Westminster Review*, giving in a general manner my explanation of the *Sonnets*. I by no means seek to disguise the regret I felt; nor did I receive consolation from knowing that, before the date (October, 1836) of that number, I had read a paper on the *Sonnets* in public, with my full explanation. All my labour seemed useless. However, on reading the article, I find my friend was mistaken; but I perceive it contains much in my own vein,—so much that I cannot speak as I wish in its praise. Give me ten such able and true lovers of our poet, and I care not for his calumniators.

HIS LEARNING.

AN old proverb must here be reversed,—“ Who shall disagree when doctors decide ?” Dr. Johnson has informed us that Dr. Farmer’s *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* has for ever settled the question. This is appalling: yet, with the assistance of the learned Upton, and Colman, the translator of *Terence*—who both dared to differ with the doctors—together with a moderate share of common sense, a man may venture on the perilous encounter.

To avoid confusion between learning and knowledge, I beg leave to confine, for my present purpose, the former to the acquirement of the dead and living languages, together with that of geography, whether at school, or in after life.

Were it possible to determine the extent of Shakespeare’s learning, it would be interesting on several accounts: it would enrich his biography; it would be an additional guide to criticism on his works; it would involve a question, supposing he knew little of the learned languages, why he did not study them thoroughly; and lastly, supposing he freely chose rather

to study other subjects than the learned languages, another question would be started,—was his choice wise or unwise?

Upton and others were at some pains to prove that Shakespeare must have read both Greek and Latin authors in their original languages; and Dr. Farmer was at more pains to prove his *conclusion*, that Shakespeare “remembered perhaps enough of his *schoolboy* learning to put the *Hig, hag, hog*, into the mouth of Sir Hugh Evans; and might pick up in the writers of the time, or in the course of conversation, a familiar phrase or two of French or Italian: but his *studies* were most* demonstratively confined to *nature* and *his own language*.”

We may concede the victory to Dr. Farmer on every excessive claim brought forward by his opponents, yet utterly disregard his *conclusion*, so far as it respects the limit of *Hig, hag, hog*; the more so, because he either turns away from the evidence of Ben Jonson, in that well known line,—

“For though thou hadst *small* Latin, and *less* Greek:”

or he attempts, against positive authority, and, except for his own purpose, most unreasonably, to read the passage,—“*small* Latin and *no* Greek.” Ben Jonson edited his own works: we may safely rely on his written and printed words being neither more nor less than we have them; nor can we suspect that he misstated his knowledge of his friend.

* Did the learned Doctor ever meet with a *demonstration* in the superlative degree?

Having read every thing in my power connected with this controversy, and reflected on it many times during several years, I cannot but adopt Colman's opinion, midway between the two extremes. His words are,—“Dr. Farmer himself will allow that Shakespeare began to learn Latin: I will allow that his *studies* lay in English: but why insist that he neither made any progress at school, nor improved his acquisitions there? The general encomiums of Suckling, Denham, Milton, &c. on *his native genius*, prove nothing; and Ben Jonson's celebrated charge of Shakespeare's *small Latin and less Greek* seems absolutely to decide that he had some knowledge of both; and, if we may judge by our time, a man who has any Greek is seldom without a very competent share of Latin; and yet such a man is very likely to study Plutarch in English, and to read translations of Ovid.”

That Shakespeare had “a very competent share of Latin;” that is, short of reading it with facility, is evident to me from the vast number of Anglo-Latin words throughout his writings. This fact has never been brought properly forward in favour of his scholarship, possibly because it did not prove enough—merely a competence in the language. On the contrary, we are told by Theobald, in his *Preface*, that, “from a greater use of Latin words than ever any other English author used, we must not infer his intimate acquaintance with that language.” This, as he candidly owns, “very much wears the appearance of a paradox;” but he explains himself in this manner. “It is certain, there is a surprising effusion of Latin words made English, far more than in any one English

author I have seen; but we must be cautious to imagine this was of his own doing. For the English tongue, in his age, began extremely to suffer by an inundation of Latin; and this, to be sure, was occasioned by the pedantry of those two monarchs, Elizabeth and James, both great Latinists. For it is not to be wondered at, if both the court and schools, equal flatterers of power, should adapt themselves to the royal taste."

This passage scarcely makes up in elegance what it wants in clearness. The meaning of it must be,—it is likely Shakespeare had authority in the literature of his time for all his words derived from Latin. Now it is barely possible such was the case, since many may be produced which cannot be at present traced to older authority; and no author of his time, known to us, not even the learned Ben, has used so great a variety of Latin words as Shakespeare. They are not indeed so staringly apparent as in Ben Jonson, because Shakespeare's good taste taught him never to display his art, but to conceal it—a secret which he seems to have kept to himself, and which few have suspected. For instance, he never would have written, "Favour your tongues," as the English of "Favete linguis," however anxious he might have been to give the sacrificial mandate to the Roman people in its truest form. Had such been his purpose, he would have done it, and done it completely like an Englishman. Whereas Ben Jonson, proud of his Latin, and prouder still to show it, wrote this unintelligible translation in his tragedy of *Sejanus*, with a note to explain it, followed by others to exhibit his

wonderful erudition respecting the ancient form of sacrifice to the goddess of Fortune.

But should it be contended, or even proved, that Shakespeare never made use of any words derived from Latin, but such as he found ready made to his hands, which is to me incredible, still I would ask—by what knowledge did he adopt and appropriate these words?—how came it they were never thrust into improper places? Be it remembered there was no dictionary, like our Dr. Johnson's, to assist him. If he himself was not sufficiently skilled in Latin, there could be nothing for his guide beyond the author's text, wherein the learned words appeared, and could that text always explain their meaning?—nay, could he always understand the text? Would he not, like the ignorant clowns in his own comedies, while straining to use an elevated style, talk stark nonsense, and, acting Dogberry's part, "write himself down an ass?" He delighted in exposing the ridiculous pretences of ignorance; yet the laugh was never raised against his own pretences.* Though free from pedantry, so free that it is argued he had no classical learning whatever, there never was a greater satirist on the improprieties of language. It is the fashion to say that he followed the fashion of his time; but

* Would Holofernes, the schoolmaster, so ready to exclaim "O, I smell false Latin!" have called a boy born on board a lighter, "*levius puer?*" Yet such is the wit put in the mouth of a schoolmaster, and more than once repeated in a modern novel. Modern critics, in their innocence, have seen no harm in it; but was it right, for the sake of a pun, to neutralize the poor boy's gender?

*the truth is, he was constantly endeavouring to correct what was wrong in writing or in speaking. Look at the repeated attempts he made in his plays; but look in particular at *Love's Labour Lost*. With what severity he there lashes the affected euphony and the obtrusive pedantry of his contemporaries! It is worthy of remark that, in this comedy, the "child of fancy, that Armado hight," among his many fancies to distinguish himself from "the rude multitude," to "be singled from the barbarous," is excessively vain of his Latinized phrases, which are formed in the worst taste; the author thus satirizing, through him, the strange discrepancy of the Latin and the English, unless the words are skilfully chosen, and as skilfully adapted. To this effect Armado calls the page a "tender Juvenal," speaks in his "condign praise," bids him bring Costard "festinately hither," calls a pageant "an ostentation," and angrily exclaims, "dost thou infamonise me?" with fifty other phrases of Latin origin, formed in the same bad taste, and ludicrously applied.*

Could the formation of words from the Latin, or the correct adoption of them in countless instances, could those pedantic fops, who confounded while they sought to blend the two languages, be exposed,—could all this be done, and with a masterly hand, by one who had not a very competent share of Latin for (I may say) so learned a purpose? Still, it is far from improbable that such a man might be unable to read a Latin author with facility, and therefore prefer to read him in translation; though, after all, we have no proof that he could not read Latin fluently; and

Upton scarcely hesitates to contend that he must have studied even the Latin metre.

From what has been asserted of the great variety of Anglo-Latin words in his writings, let it not be imagined that they predominate; for a still greater variety will be found of words purely Saxon, or derived from the original well-springs of our language. His immense vocabulary, his command of words, and his taste in applying them to his various purposes of meaning and sound, place him above every other author in composition. Should a student of poetry examine his lines carefully, he may discover much whereby to guide him. The quality of the character speaking must of course be well considered; after which, it strikes me, the choice of words will be generally found congenial with the expression. Where a stateliness or artificial grandeur is intended, Latin and other foreign words are aptly introduced, as

“ And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples—the great globe itself—
Yea, all which it inherits, shall dissolve.”

“ The nature of our people,
Our city's institutions, and the terms
For common justice, you are as pregnant in,
As art and practice hath enriched any
That we remember.”

“ The multitudinous seas incarnadine.”

“ Incarnadine” is Italian, or French derived from Italian. From which did he take it, since Dr.

Johnson, who doubts his knowledge of either language, says he can find no other instance of its use?

But when Shakespeare seeks to "make the sound an echo to the sense," his words are pure old English, at least as old as Chaucer :

" Under the shade of melancholy boughs."

" Split'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak."

" And when they talk of him, they shake their heads,
And whisper one another in the ear ;
And he that speaks, doth gripe the hearer's wrist."

Or when he would impress us with a simple homebred feeling, he uses the simplest and the homeliest English words :

" I dare do all that doth become a man ;
Who dares do more, is none."

" He was a man ; take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again."

Pages might be filled with such instances, but they are not to my present purpose.

His frequent appropriate use of the heathen mythology, and of the classical heroes, has been brought forward as evidence of his learning ; but, as Dr. Farmer has shown, that knowledge might have been gained, as well as now, without Greek or Latin. Yet, had he displayed ignorance on these subjects, he might be proved somewhat unlearned. Accordingly, the annotators have brought forward no less than three examples of this ignorance, which happily, at least two of them, prove nothing but the ignorance

of his critics. The first is in *Henry IV, Part 2nd*, where Hecuba's dream of a fire-brand is called Althea's,—a mistake certainly, but one which rather proves he was acquainted with both stories. Besides, Dr. Johnson, who notices it, ought to have remembered, as an editor, a line in *Henry the Sixth, Part 2nd*, which Shakespeare, if he did not write it, must have well known, and which proves he was aware of the nature of Althea's brand :

“ As did the fatal brand Althea burn'd.”

Henley brings forward the second example from *Macbeth*, thus annotating on the words “ Bellona's bridegroom :”—“ This passage may be added to the many others, which show how little he knew of ancient mythology.” The many others !—where are they ? In the mean time, why is Henley's classic lore offended ? Is it because he had never heard, among the ancients, of Bellona's bridegroom ? Alas ! it was Macbeth himself the poet meant ! Had he been termed, in his capacity of a soldier, a son of Mars, the liberty would have been as great, but, owing to the triteness of the appellation, not to be cavilled at as a proof of ignorance, though it would have made the doughty Thane of Glamis the brother of Cupid. What Shakespeare said, poetically said, was, that the warlike hero was worthy of being the bridegroom of the goddess of war. This is the passage :

“ Norway himself, with terrible numbers,
Assisted by that most disloyal traitor
The Thane of Cawdor, 'gan a dismal conflict ;

*Till that Bellona's bridegroom, lapp'd in proof,
Confronted him with self comparisons,
Point against point rebellious, arm 'gainst arm,
Curbing his lavish spirit."*

Stevens gives us the third proof of ignorance in these lines from the *Merchant of Venice*:

" In such a night
Stood Dido, with a willow in her hand,
Upon the wild sea-banks, and waved her love
To come again to Carthage."

" This passage," quoth Stevens, in a matter-of-fact note, " contains a small instance, out of many that might be brought, to prove that Shakespeare was no reader of the classics." Out of many that might be brought!—why not bring them? And why was this brought? Purely because Virgil did not describe Dido *with a willow in her hand*? Stevens ought to have known, according to Virgil, that Dido was forsaken by her lover, and that the giving her the allegorical willow, was nothing more nor less than a poetical description of her love-lorn state. As for the other instances, I have not found them,—the " many others," and the " many that might be brought." These critics remind me of the drunken magistrate, who, seeing himself in a looking-glass at the moment he expected a criminal to be brought before him, cried out,—“ Ah! thou caitiff! many a time and oft hast thou been brought before me!”

I do not desire to urge the argument in favour of Shakespeare's learning, beyond that competent share of Latin, which was, in his time, necessary for his

writings, and which his writings themselves bear testimony he must have possessed. In other words, not beyond the account given of him by Ben Jonson, bearing in mind that he, a reputed great scholar, was unlikely to call any man's learning, such as I suppose Shakespeare's to have been, otherwise than by the epithet *small*. Besides, the account given, "*small* Latin, and *less* Greek," while it proves that his Greek was worthy of notice, informs us that his Latin was comparatively great.

Having thus shown my reasons for arriving at the same conclusion with Colman, in opposition to Dr. Farmer, I may now ask, why Shakespeare did not study the learned languages thoroughly.

The usual answer to this would have been, that his education was unhappily circumscribed by the poverty of his father, at least, when the boy was in his fourteenth year; but that I cannot receive. Are there no instances of lads being taught gratuitously, not out of charity, but from kindness towards them, because they show a disposition to learn? Was not his grammar-school sufficient as a groundwork? Is it incredible that a lad, or a young man, should, of his own will, teach himself, and improve his previous education? Dr. Farmer and others, in their arguments, assume for granted two untenable positions. The first is, that the acquirement of a language, to the extent of being able to read it with tolerable skill, is a great difficulty; and the second is, that it cannot be acquired by a boy at a grammar-school, so as to furnish the means of after improvement. As-

sumptions may be often refuted by argument ; but the shorter method is by facts.

In respect to the difficulty, let me not be thought invidious towards our Universities, while I state no more than I can easily prove from various publications,—it is easier to obtain a degree than to write good English. Two other facts I can bring forward against both positions.

A young man, not having been taught a word of Latin in his education, at the age of twenty began to learn it without a master, because he believed it might be useful to him in the profession he had adopted. I knew him intimately, and can assert he became far better acquainted with that language than many who have received a regular College education. Assuredly he might have proceeded to excellence ; but he had acquired enough for his purpose. Afterwards he studied Italian by himself, spoke it accurately, and published the best grammar we have of that language. Should it be objected, that possibly his mind was peculiarly adapted to such studies, not distracted by poetical imagery, or by anxious yearnings for fame, and that such an example must stand alone,—I knew another, the poet Keats, to whom the same objection cannot be made. From an unpublished memoir which I have written of his life, I take the following : “ Owing to his early removal from school, he felt a deficiency in the Latin language, and therefore, during his apprenticeship, made and carefully wrote out a literal translation of the whole of Virgil’s *Æneid*. This I had from his own mouth : and he was so far

a good scholar, by his own application, as to enjoy the study of Cicero's style." Afterwards, when it might be presumed his mind was wholly occupied in *Lamia* or *Hyperion*, I have seen him deeply absorbed in the study of Greek and Italian, both which languages he then commenced, and to which he allotted a portion of each day. With these examples, (and similar ones, I conceive, must be known to many) is it not certain that such a man as Shakespeare, might have become an excellent Latin scholar, had he chosen to employ his time to that purpose? As he did not excel in Latin, it follows that he did not choose to occupy his time in it, away from, what he considered, more useful studies.

To remove any possible doubt on this subject, let us turn to the biography of Ben Jonson, a reputed classical scholar, and see if he did not labour under equal disadvantages. He was the posthumous son of a poor and persecuted clergyman; and, soon after his birth, his mother, from necessity, married a bricklayer. He was sent to a private school in the church of St. Martin in the Fields; and afterwards some friend, it is supposed, placed him in Westminster School, whence his mother removed him, as soon as he was old enough to assist his father-in-law in brick-laying. One account mentions that he was then matriculated at Cambridge, but quickly returned home, unable to maintain himself there. But his own account is that, disliking the occupation of his father-in-law, he went into the Low Countries as a soldier. After his return to England, he became a member of the University of Cambridge; but, says Whalley,

“ the time he continued at Cambridge was undoubtedly short.” From the University he went to London, and failed as an actor in an obscure theatre in the neighbourhood of Clerkenwell. Poverty and misfortune pursued him. He was thrown into prison for killing a brother player in a duel. The next we hear of him is, that at about the age of twenty, poor as he was, he married, and is supposed to have been writing for the stage, either by himself, or conjointly with others. All we know is that, at the end of two years more, he had two children, and had written *Every Man in his Humour*.

Few early lives have been so unpromising for classical honours; yet, in spite of his dissipation, styled convivialty, more destructive than poverty of study, he was created Master of Arts at Oxford, when he was at the age of forty-five. His early history and that of Shakespeare agree on many points. Both were bred in poverty, were educated at grammar schools, were married when young, became players, and were dramatic poets. Should it be urged that Westminster School, with Camden as a teacher, must have been superior to that at Stratford, and that there might be something also acquired at Cambridge; let it be remembered, on the other hand, in Ben Jonson's disfavour, that all this happened before he was sixteen, that he was not long at Westminster, a still less time at Cambridge, and that his being some time, while yet a youth, in the army, was an indisputable injury to his education. With these facts fairly laid before us, can we deny that Shakespeare had it in his power to make himself as learned as Ben Jonson?

If none can deny it, then it was his lack of ambition for academic honours, his choice that led him to pursue other studies than the dead languages, which caused him to yield, as Schlegel says of him, to "the general direction of his inclination not towards the collection of words but of facts."

Thus we come to the other question,—was his choice wise or unwise? To answer this, I know of no better process than that of again confronting him with Ben Jonson. It is true they stand at an immeasurable distance from each other; but it is not requisite here to place their merits in competition. It will, I am aware, be impossible to prove that Shakespeare would have been better or worse, if qualified for Master of Arts; but the bare notion of such a consummation is awful. If the necessary consequence would have been, with him, to give translations from the ancients; to treat us in a tragedy with an oration of three hundred and thirty-seven lines, as we find in *Cataline*, purely because it was the identical oration of Cicero; or, in a comedy, with a tedious paraphrase of one of Horace's satires; if it would have filled him with so much pedantry as to make him insist on applause exactly in proportion to his imitation of the classics; and to bring on the stage a Grex, in order to explain his meaning and profound erudition to the untutored multitude; if, in short, he would have been induced to sacrifice his own thoughts, his own poetry, and his own wisdom, to the thoughts, poetry, and wisdom of Athens and Rome; then I unhesitatingly declare my thankfulness that he was not so learned as Ben Jonson, or rather as he is considered to have been. More

learning might possibly have distorted his genius, but could it have improved it? Could it have added one jot to his knowledge of human nature; or of all that is in the natural world, or refined his art as a poet, or as a dramatist? And what is especially to the purpose, can we point out a passage in his works, wherein he has betrayed a deficiency in classic lore? Had there been any, how triumphantly would it have been laid before our eyes! I know of none; that is, none beyond the customary liberties of his age.

It is a curious circumstance that passages in Ben Jonson have been exposed by his commentators as erroneous in translation, or faulty in classical knowledge; but, such is the value of a good character, they are of course ascribed to haste, oversight, or heedlessness, any thing rather than to ignorance in a Master of Arts. A saint may freely commit a sin, for which a sinner would be whipped.

Every thing has its cause; and the unreasonable conduct of mankind is usually deducible from an unreasonable one, if our reason will stoop to trace it. Exactly in proportion to the admiration which Shakespeare's works enforced from contemporary classic students, was the humiliating distress that he had neither taken a degree nor studied at either of our Universities. It mattered not how great his studies had been elsewhere; they had not the legitimate stamp. Thence arose the absurd desire to place Ben Jonson above him,—if not in poetry, then in the classical conduct of his dramas, or in something which ought to please by authority, beyond mere nature, displayed with home-bred English art. No one,

before Shakespeare, had dared to claim observance from the public as a poet, without his brow being bound with academic laurels. Excellence, without that distinction, was the more confounding as it was acknowledged by scholars themselves. His democratic genius rose superior to the aristocracy of learning. Those who had obtained a degree at Oxford or at Cambridge lost much of their importance; they were no longer in the only high road to fame. A death-blow was aimed at their exclusive admiration of the ancients. It was proved that the efforts of the human mind had not formerly found their limits; and mediocrity knew not whither to fly for an idol, pre-eminent in power, except where it was a heresy in classic faith to lift the eye. In this way I attempt to account for the existence of a pedantic party in his time, who seized on Ben Jonson as their chief; though neither they, nor far less the academic poet, could forbear yielding to the democratic power. Half-blinded by envy, they spoke of him at first as an "upstart crow;" but, spreading his wings, he proved himself an eagle.

The same party, under different names, reappeared in the last century, all acknowledging his superiority, but seeking to deprive him of those honours, which they could not allow him to possess without pain to themselves; because the poet still remained a mighty evidence against their own factitious pretensions. They went a step farther than in his time,—declaring he was utterly unlearned. As Dryden wrote, "those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greatest commendation." That they not only

granted, but were willing to represent him like a being out of nature, an inconceivable prodigy, rather than confess that a man could learn any thing valuable, unless he had bowed for instruction before another man in a wig. Why did not these gentlemen speak in the same strain of Homer and the Greek tragedians? Had they authority for imagining those great poets were students of any but their native language? Did they flatter their self-love in believing that Homer must have taken out a diploma either in Attica or in Bœotia? The critics of the last century, like those at the close of the sixteenth, were interested parties in the discussion. Add to this, the levelling principle is strong within us. It may be observed that, with the exception of Upton and a few others, his greatest admirers, as a poet and philosopher, have been the first to attack, or the most remiss in defending, his learning. On the ground that learning is estimable, he must be deprived of it by the invidious; or a critic may be tempted to the task, because he will thereby have an excellent opportunity of displaying his own learning while he is straining to disprove that of Shakespeare. Thus he may, in one particular, fancy himself ranked above the greatest writer in the world; but so might an ass, because he can boast of four legs against the poet's two. But the chief cause, I am convinced, may be traced to Shakespeare's offensive disregard of a University degree.

The controversy respecting the merits of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson was not, in their day, so much a question of which was the better scholar, but whose plays ought to be considered superior in plan

and management; those founded on classic rules, embellished with translations or imitations; or those on pure English models, with sentiments of native growth. The public, including the best judges, plainly decided in favour of the latter.

There is an anecdote, little known perhaps, though given in the annotations, taken from the Harleian MS. which I value, because I verily believe it genuine, for it bears the mark of Shakespeare's good-humoured punning raillery; and also because it proves that these two great rivals in the public favour, (though Ben was certainly sometimes angry) lived on the whole in a friendly manner together. It is necessary to understand that the custom was to present a god-child with a set of Apostle-spoons; and that *latten*, a word now out of use, is a sort of base metal. "Shakespeare was god-father to one of Ben Jonson's children, and after the christening, being in deep study, Jonson came to cheer him up, and asked him why he was so melancholy? 'No 'faith, Ben,' says he, 'not I! But I have been considering a great while what should be the fittest gift for me to bestow upon my god-child, and I have resolved at last.' 'I pr'ythee, what?' says he. 'I'faith, Ben, I'll give him a dozen good *latten* spoons, and *thou* shalt *translate* them.' "

Some may mercifully imagine it was sufficiently severe to deprive Shakespeare of the modicum of Latin and Greek, which his rival had bestowed on him; but no, Dr. Farmer's severity could not stop there; he must needs strip him of French and Italian. His attempts with the Italian, and those of his coadjutors, have been already noticed. As there is much French

in several scenes, one would conceive it was a hard task to deprive him of it. By no means ; Dr. Farmer pretty nearly settles that point by quoting Dr. Johnson ; “ it may be suspected that some other man wrote the French scenes.” This is an unwarrantable suspicion, unworthy of two learned doctors, and looks like an humble imitation of

“ Garth did not write his own Dispensary !”

The evil of controversy is that men are apt to argue unfairly on every thing but what makes for their side of the question. Dr. Farmer gives desperate hits at his opponents wherever he perceives they are vulnerable, pretending to prove, by his success, that they are vulnerable every where. He will look no farther into the text than will serve for his argument. Thus, after expatiating on the mispronunciation of *bras* into *brass*, and holding it up as a proof of Shakespeare's ignorance of the language, he is contented that all the good French which follows in the same scene, contrasted with the clever comic English-French of the boy, should fall under the suspicion of having been written by “ some other man ;” blind, or perversely shutting his eyes to the fact that the “ other man,” if such a one had been employed, was accountable, not Shakespeare, for the mispronunciation of *bras*. That “ other man ” must have been frequently employed, since there is a great deal of French in the historical plays, and some touches of it elsewhere ; besides, he must have had, within himself, some touches of the genius of Shakespeare.

Whatever were his acquirements in the languages,

he has been guilty of errors in geography, which plainly prove he might have had a better education with advantage. That of giving a sea-coast to Bohemia, appears at first sight inexcusable. It is true the error exists in the novel of *Dorastus and Fawnia*, by Robert Greene, from which the *Winter's Tale* was taken. Robert Greene, who thus set the example of bringing the sea to Bohemia, studied at Cambridge, where he took his bachelor's degree in 1578, signed himself "Master of Arts in both Universities," and is supposed to have been one of the Queen's Chaplains. A better education, therefore, as far as geography is concerned, might not have been at either of our Universities. But the best apology that can be offered for Shakespeare is, that geography was, in his time, little known and less taught. It was a science studied by few, even among the gentry. The maps in Queen Elizabeth's reign were scarce, strangely puzzling, and very incorrect. Dr. Farmer, (here he is of use) after noticing the ridicule thrown on authors for their geographical blunders by Cervantes, the contemporary of our poet, mentions this, on the authority of Lord Herbert: "De Luines, the prime-minister of France, when he was ambassador in Bohemia, demanded whether it was an inland country, or lay upon the sea?" A prime-minister's ignorance, or the ignorance of a Master of Arts, is certainly but a poor excuse for a poet's; yet it does much as showing the ungeographical character of the age. The *Winter's Tale*, on other grounds, besides the one stated by Malone, I believe must have been one of the earlier plays; and the *Two Gentlemen of*

Verona, where the other blunder appears, of sending Valentine by ship from Verona to Milan, is, to my mind, the first. It may be that these faults arose from sheer ignorance, without any stain on his education, considering the period. Granting so much, it must be conceded, on the other hand, that he afterwards made himself a master of geography sufficient to prevent similar mistakes; because in no other play can he be convicted of one; and in the *Taming of the Shrew* he shows a perfect knowledge of the North of Italy, the very place where he committed his mistake in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

Among the many ingenious attempts to convict Shakespeare of a want of scholarship, it is wonderful we have none to prove that he could not spell his own name. Here is a plausible ground for argument. From the feeble and tremulous signatures to his will, contradictory evidence might be deduced; and we have his autograph in only one or two more documents, from which another opinion may be upheld. These together might serve to moot a learned discussion on his ignorance. Having taken the pains of drawing out a list of fourteen methods of spelling his name, every one of which rested on some sort of authority, I was surprised to find that Dr. Drake had discovered seventeen more, all different, among the entries in the books of the Stratford Corporation. With these thirty-one methods, on which ought we to fix? I see no good reason for the modern method; on the contrary, it is bad, inasmuch as *Shak* cannot be pronounced *Shake*. What is our best authority? —surely that of the best informed of his contem-

poraries, Meres and others, but more particularly that of his personal friends and co-partners, Heminge and Condell, who edited the first folio. Though not essential, it is yet of some importance to be able to write the name of our country's grandest poet. He himself, like others of his period, might have spelt his name differently at different times.

HIS KNOWLEDGE.

WHATEVER opinion, in regard to his learning, may be withstood or controverted, no one has pretended to doubt the greatness of his knowledge; by which I mean, the numerous facts and speculations stored within his mind, not only through the medium of books, but by his own observation and experience. The sole point unsettled, is the boundary of his intellectual attainments. Many are induced to extend it to too large a sphere; some in the belief of an incomprehensible and mysterious power attending genius; some in the opinion that a poet's imagination is of itself enabled to rise to its utmost strength, involving all knowledge; and that Shakespeare's imagination was grand and universal, purely because it was unassisted and unfettered by the thoughts of others. Such a belief, or such an opinion, has no reasonable foundation; and, like all false notions, it is injurious; since it teaches the tempting doctrine, that the most favoured by nature have the least necessity for study.

There is nothing mysterious in genius, any more than that one man should have a stronger arm than another. Genius is a superior power in certain faculties of the mind; and the man who has the greatest power bestowed on the greatest number of his mental faculties, must be the greatest natural genius. Still, so gifted a being possesses the means only, which, like hoards of riches, may be misdirected, or altogether unemployed. Those means are not knowledge, as a piece of money is not bread—but the power of acquiring knowledge, not one atom of which is given by nature. To shine forth a bright intellectual star, and not a faintly-glimmering, a beclouded, or a fallen one, genius must add the world's experience to its own; ponder and deeply meditate over the records of humanity, while it scans its own instincts, feelings, and passions: it must grasp at every species of knowledge, carefully sifting the bran from the nourishing wheat; and, above all, apply its utmost energies to one sole object, with a constant and unwearied purpose of benefitting mankind. In this view, and this view alone, can we be truly grateful to Shakespeare; not for his natural genius, but for his noble cultivation of it.

Then, in respect to that peculiar faculty of a poet—a superior imagination—it must be founded on reality, and produced from a series of inferences, or it is nothing but the dream of a madman. If it has the power, which I am disposed to deny, of describing anything uncongenial to the world of nature, which neither touches our sympathies nor antipathies, neither appeals to our feelings nor our reason, it would be as

uninteresting as a painting by Raphael to a flock of sheep or a shoal of fishes. The more imaginative the work, the more necessary is knowledge, in all its varied forms.

Less study, less experience in human nature, less mental acquirements of every kind, I conceive were employed on *Macbeth*, wonderfully as the whole character is displayed before us, than on those imaginary creations, the three weird sisters, who haunt his steps, and prey upon his very being. Holinshed gave the groundwork equally for both : from him the poet created a merciful man, goaded on by his wife's and his own ambition, and solicited by supernatural agency, to deeds of startling cruelty,—a mighty subject ! and, at the same moment, arose the witches,—a mightier subject still ! Not only are their forms, but their passions are human ; both, indeed, hideous, yet not too revolting, at the distance where they are placed, to be seen or listened to with pleasure. In their relationship to ourselves, in their absolute identity with our malignant passions, we cannot withhold a fearful fellow interest. The art of investing them at once with all the evil that is within us, and with superhuman power, renders them appalling, awful. Their words, uttered by other lips, would raise our laughter, but from them they excite horror. Even the joy they express is serious, momentous, and unlawful. They are not the miserable wretches dragged to the bar of one of our ancient criminal courts, for they came we know not whence, and vanish at their will into thin air, and they serve a mistress of the night, who is wafted on a “foggy cloud” up to “the

corner of the moon;" one who worships other unnamed spirits, whose powers are undefined. To represent these earthly, yet unearthly, agents, just within the verge of disgustful abhorrence, never to offend, but, on the contrary, to afford mental delight, is a task requiring more general knowledge, nicer metaphysical distinctions, a deeper insight into the feelings both of readers and spectators, than, I believe, were requisite for a Macbeth. Such beings are called the creations of a poet; perhaps they ought rather to be called his combinations, unless the former term is given on a principle like that of the Hindoos, who have but one word to signify carpenter and creator; but neither the poet nor the carpenter could create any thing without solid materials wherewith to work.

If the commentators were correct in tracing so many of his allusions, phrases, and expressions, from ancient English authors, and the current literature of his day, they have proved the wide extent and diversity of his reading. Indeed, it is hardly to be imagined that, as a literary man, he would be unacquainted with any author worthy his attention. His inquiring mind, as is evident from the tenour and complexion of his works, could not have been content with less. All his editors have agreed in this opinion. Yet, with the exception of historical facts, or fables, whereon to frame his plays, a passing anecdote, a local custom, a witticism, seized on for the sake of illustration, or the adoption of mere words, it does not appear that he copied anything; that is, he was not indebted to others for any part of the imagery or the philosophy of his poetry. He had his old English

authors, as well as ourselves, and his modern ones, a large and valuable collection; but they did no more than give to his writings their "form and pressure." This fact has been unnoticed by those who point out his freedom from imitation of the classics, as an argument against his learning. Truth is, he imitated nobody. Had he chosen to adopt the thoughts of the Greeks and Romans, it was not more difficult to arrive at them, than to read Chaucer and Spenser, even if he was entirely ignorant of the learned languages; as may be seen by Stevens' list of translations from the classics during the reign of Elizabeth; a list, which can scarcely be surpassed in number at the present day. His mind was too rich to need the grafting from a foreign stock. Reading, to him, was information, an exercise and sharpening of the intellect; themes to be controverted, or extended, or imbued with originality; models, good or bad, to be improved or avoided, according to his own judgment, in the composition of prose or verse. For the rhythm of the latter, I believe, he must have deeply studied his country's poets, before his varied and peculiar intonation of verse could have arrived at perfection; for surely there was much study, as well as practice, necessary to improve his lines, from his earliest to his latest works; nay, from the first poem, addressed to William Herbert, to the fifth,—including a period of only three years.

With all their wealth of information and instruction, books can afford no more than the reflected minds of other men. Some of these are glorious indeed; but if we are heedless or incapable of a right judgment,

we may often read and be deceived. We attain from books, when aided by our best discernment, nothing but a second-hand knowledge. In Shakespeare's works themselves, we cannot arrive at the ore; we must be content with what he has fashioned from it. All such knowledge is, in its nature, scattered and incomplete; but so, indeed, must also be our more valuable observation and experience,—more valuable, if we can profit by them to the full. The utmost of human knowledge can only rest on these three; and he who possesses the most of them, with a purpose of doing good, is the wisest man. In this sense, I call Shakespeare the wisest man, as well as the greatest poet. Fortunately for the world, his wisdom was not unproductive, as it might have been, if not invested with an imagination capable of immortalizing it, and with the power of bestowing enchanting eloquence on his acute and healthy distinction of all things pertaining to our nature and our moral duties; so that the same wise mind effectually communicated itself to its fellow-beings, to those then living, and to ages yet unborn:

“He was not of an age, but for all time.”

This line from Ben Jonson, in his praise, together with the honest declaration in his *Discoveries*,—“For I love the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any,”—is ample satisfaction for any petulance he might, in his disappointed love of fame, have uttered against his friend and rival. Some there may be, who would not allow Shakespeare so much as a rival's praise. For them, but chiefly, I

must confess, for my own pleasure, I would prove him to have been the wisest man, as well as the greatest poet; otherwise I should stop short, and repeat those two lines from Milton's epitaph on him—

“ Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,
What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?”

In addition to what I have said of the great study requisite to the formation of Shakespeare's works, the probability that, when a lad, he attempted to adapt Seneca's tragedies, or that he imitated them in some way; the certainty we have, that, among his first dramatic efforts, he altered the plays of his fellow poets; together with what I have endeavoured to make evident—the continual cultivation of his mind afterwards; I bring forward a remarkable passage from Ben Jonson's poem on his memory. Assuredly he spoke from an intimate acquaintance with his “beloved” friend's persevering energies in arriving at excellence in art:

“ Yet must I not give nature all: thy art,
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.
For though the poet's matter nature be,
His art doth give the fashion. And, that he
Who casts to write a living line, must sweat,
(Such as thine are) and strike the second heat
Upon the Muse's anvil; turn the same,
And himself with it, that he thinks to frame;
Or for the laurel, he may gain a scorn;
For a good poet's made, as well as born;
And such wert thou. Look how the father's face
Lives in his issue; even so the race

Of Shakespeare's mind and manners brightly shines
In his well-turned and true-filed lines ;
In each of which he seems to shake a lance,
As brandished at the eyes of ignorance."

This is real praise, from one who well knew him personally. Nothing has been more injurious to the character of our poet than the repeated assertions, in spite of common sense, that he owed every thing to nature. Mediocrity and idleness may be consoled by such a doctrine, but at the wasting expense of the object of their affected admiration. By slow gradations, by practice, and by laborious study, he arrived at perfection. Let no human being imagine there is a shorter road to excellence, however astonishing may be his natural powers. Genius may be combined with idleness, and indeed with folly.

The same argument applies to his knowledge of the human heart. This knowledge, at once general and particular, is such, that, if we examine into any one of his characters, and attend not only to the broad effect of colour, but to the minutest touches, we shall be surprised to discover that we become, in our investigation, more and more intimately acquainted with the individual. Whether we turn to Lear or his court-fool, to Juliet or her nurse, to Othello or Falstaff, to Lady Macbeth or Beatrice, men or women, old or young, of whatever degree, influenced by whatever situation, mood, or purpose, each is discriminatingly and accurately delineated, each gives utterance to thoughts, feelings, and passions, precisely in the manner he or she must do under the circumstances of the scene, yet all speaking in the poet's own golden

language, and giving us, as it were, unconsciously to themselves, the highest delight and instruction. Many authors have described characters in an admirable manner; but who, Shakespeare excepted, has made them describe themselves, without apparent effort, and to perfection? How he could identify himself with hundreds of human beings, each distinct from the rest; how he could utterly possess their hearts and minds, and be entire master of the hidden springs of their actions, and of their varied mode of expression, is unimaginable to us his inferiors. This power is the Gordian knot which some would fain cut asunder by saying, that his knowledge of human nature was intuitive, and that his genius was essentially dramatic, beyond his own control. But many, with me, having no faith in intuition beyond our mere instincts, no faith in continual, fortuitous, self-impelled excellence, are forced to ascribe that power to a far simpler cause,—an immense acquired knowledge of mankind, together with a profound study of his art, assisted and strengthened by his capacious, retentive, and clear-reasoning mind,—or, if you will, his genius.

We are told by Dr. Johnson,—"He that will understand Shakespeare, must not be content to study him in the closet; he must look for his meaning sometimes among the sports of the field, and sometimes among the manufactures of the shop." True, he was unwilling to omit any thing interesting to humanity; and had science existed in his days as in our's, instead of the very word being scarcely known in its modern sense, he might have still more puzzled the Doctor by his scientific allusions. We find that,

far as his observation reached, he was a good naturalist ; from “ the shard-borne beetle, with his drowsy hums,” and the “ guest of summer, the temple-haunting martlett,” down to

“ The marigold, that goes to bed with the sun,
And with him rises weeping ; * *
* * * * daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty ; violets, dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno’s eyes,
Or Cytherea’s breath ; pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength.”

A hunting squire would by no means despise the conversation about hounds in the *Induction* to the *Taming of the Shrew*, nor the description which Theseus gives of his pack in *Midsummer Night’s Dream* ; a Newmarket jockey of his day, for since then the breeding of horses has been changed, would have listened with applause to the exact portraiture of a fine-bred horse in the poem of *Venus and Adonis* ; and a sailor, whatever Dr. Johnson’s informant might have said to the contrary, can find no fault with the Boatswain’s orders throughout the opening scene of the *Tempest*. To lay to, in a main-sail, under a heavy gale,—if that was the objection,—has been often practised, though not of late years, in the British navy. Nay, men of science might discover more hints than I can in his works relating to their pursuits. A professor of anatomy has noticed to his students that Shakespeare must inevitably have been acquainted with the peculiar mechanism, the ginglimoid structure,

of the human knee, or he could not have written this line,

“ And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee.”

But, however that assertion may be received, I perceive he was certainly indebted to a scientific discovery of his time, not known to have then existed, or to his own practical researches into the laws of nature, in Perdita's account of “ streaked gilliflowers;” plainly implying that he was fully aware of the art, said to be discovered only within these few years, which is called manipulation or caprification by botanists. From this art we may obtain countless varieties of flowers and fruits. Stevens has a blind, sneering note on the passage; but had it been earlier understood, the vegetable world might have been, by this time, wonderfully enriched

HIS DRAMATIC KNOWLEDGE AND ART.

SOME have contended, and many have indirectly assumed, that he was ignorant of the laws necessary to the construction of the classic drama ; that is, of the three unities ; but this must be held to be impossible. His intimacy with Ben Jonson, who strongly inculcated the propriety of a strict adherence to classical rules, forbad it. Four of his plays, the *Comedy of Errors*, (which he took from a translation of Plautus) *Love's Labour Lost*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the *Tempest*, are written with as much regard to the three unities as Ben Jonson himself paid to them in his earliest work, perhaps on the whole his masterpiece, *Every Man in his Humour*. Indeed the unity of action in this comedy is less pure than in any comedy by Shakespeare ; old Knowell's parental solicitude, and Kiteley's jealousy of his wife, stand so nearly on the same eminence, that it is difficult to say which is the episode to the other, except that the latter is the more interesting. Putting aside the probability of our poet's having studied, while in a lawyer's office, the tragedies of Seneca, we know that

a translation existed of them for his perusal, as well as of the comedies of Terence. We also know he read the *Supposes*, a regular comedy, translated from Ariosto, by the use he made of it in the *Taming of the Shrew*. Before his time, the *Supposes* had been acted; so had *Jocasta*, from Euripides; and *Gorbuduc*, a classically formed tragedy. He could not be ignorant of what the literary world in London was then arguing as the vital question of our drama. At its birth in Elizabeth's reign, it appeared in a classic form, seemingly without much success. Authors very soon discovered that an alliance with the old favourites of the people, the irregular *Mysteries* and *Moralities*, was more acceptable to their audiences, and thus arose the mixed nature of our national drama. Mrs. Montague, in her *Essay*, has well observed, "Our stage arose from hymns to the Virgin, and encomiums to the patriarchs and the saints; as the Grecian tragedies from the hymns to Bacchus."

Much as I am averse to at least nine-tenths of what Dr. Johnson has written on Shakespeare, and pained at the fact of his having led, by his authority, so many into error, he has my gratitude for that part of his *Preface*, wherein he argues against the necessity of our subservience to the three unities. The unity of action he considers indispensable, and to have been sufficiently regarded by Shakespeare; but the unities of time and place he shows, in his most powerfully convincing manner, to be not only unnecessary, but rather to be rejected. The passage alluded to commences with,—“His histories being neither tragedies nor comedies,”—and ends with,—“dignity or force

to the soliloquy of Cato." My first idea was to transcribe it; but it would occupy pages, and is either well known or easily referred to by any one interested in the argument.

I wish it were possible to write as forcibly in favour of those sins against chronology, or violations of costume, so frequent with our old dramatists. Schlegel and others have urged much in their excuse, if not in their defence. On this subject Shakespeare, because he is more read than his contemporaries, is made the scape-goat of the whole flock; whereas he is innocent compared with others. Together with our mixed drama, this fault had sprung from the old *Mysteries*, and had therefore been rendered familiar to men's minds. The people were accustomed to incongruities. In the olden time it was by no means an uncommon thing to see one of the holy patriarchs on the scene, and to hear some attendant buffoon, if not the patriarch himself, (for their sacred representations would be profane to us) talk of taking a cup of canaries in Cheapside, at the sign of the Rose and Crown; or some such monstrous anachronism. We may smile at this, but the classic Virgil has committed the most flagrant anachronism, throughout the regions of poetry, in the meeting of Dido and Æneas; because it is neither a passing observation, nor a trifling incident, but a grand and leading event of his poem. Yet Virgil is excused, and even applauded for it; perhaps for no better reason than that he is denominated classic.

But let us examine into the conduct of the peers and contemporaries of our poet, according to the pre-

cept of the author of *Hudibras*, in his well argued poem, *On Critics who judge of modern plays precisely by the rules of the Ancients*:—

“An English poet should be tried b’ his peers,
And not by pedants and philosophers,
Incompetent to judge poetic fury,
As butchers are forbid to b’ of a jury.”

Omitting the writers before his time, including Marlowe, among whom the examples more frequently occur, none will be found guiltless of gross incongruities. Beaumont and Fletcher saw no impropriety in giving a pistol to the *Humorous Lieutenant*, immediately after the death of Alexander the Great; but these “twin stars of wit,” it must be confessed, never seemed to heed when or where their scene was laid. Webster and Rowley, in their *Thracian Wonder*, where the Delphic Oracle is mentioned, and where Pythia herself is introduced, have no hesitation in talking of the “Turks,” and sending a king of Africa abroad with an army to punish “Christendom.” Webster in his *Appius and Virginia*, talks, as a matter of course, of “Dutchmen” and “Frenchwomen.” Massinger, who I once thought was tolerably correct, in the days of the emperor Dioclesian, styles Bacchus, “Head-warden of Vintner’s Hall, ale-conner, and mayor of all victualling houses;” and makes one of the old Romans speak “French.” He notices, in his *Bondman*, the “College of Physicians,” at Syracuse, prior to the fall of Carthage. His emperor Domitian pulls out his watch, wishing to move the “dial’s tongue to six;” and his emperor Theodosius is acquainted with the fame of “Paracelsus,” his

junior by a thousand years. I have here pointed out only some of the instances which first attracted my notice, on hastily turning over their works; and they are enough for my purpose. Nor is the scrupulous Ben Jonson, though his scenes are rarely laid out of England, or away from his own age, less faulty; since in his *Poetaster*, where Virgil, Ovid, and Horace, are on the stage, he writes about a "coat of arms," and about "Owleglass," a certain Dutch mock hero. Besides which, in *Volpone*, the catastrophe is founded on laws, declared to be strictly Venetian, which never existed in Venice; and, in *Every Man out of his Humour*, where the scene is not explicitly stated, though, by the allusions and facts mentioned in the dialogue, it must necessarily be in London, the greater part of the native characters have Italian names, and call each other, in surprising incongruity, "Signor," and "Signora."

It has been remarked to me that our old poets were like men who rush into any armoury, ancient or modern, for sword or buckler, heedless of their fashion, provided they best serve their purposes. Good; but why did they so? Was it purely because they well knew that, by so doing, they would not shock the antiquarian knowledge of their audiences? Had they no ambition to appear faultless in the eyes of better judges, when their works might be printed? Was it sheer wilfulness on their part knowingly and premeditatedly? For myself, perceiving this occasional disregard of what is esteemed by modern critics, essential at all times, among authors, who, nearly every one, were educated at our universities, I cannot

but imagine they had some saving clause in their defence. Let us suppose, for instance, that they were accused by some scholar and antiquary, as possibly they were, of committing unpardonable incongruities; might not one among them have answered him thus, without discrepancy in reasoning, poetically considered?

Perhaps you will grant it is inconceivable how a people could be civilized, unless they had received instructions in ethics from some philosopher, imperfect as he may have been in comparison with others, whom they probably regarded with some such reverence as Alexander the Great paid to Aristotle. Now the Trojans are represented as a civilized people; and the dramatic poet, not possibly knowing who their own peculiar Aristotle was, is at liberty to make Hector speak of him under that philosopher's actual name, in order to render his meaning intelligible to his audience. Again, should a poet, in his admiration of the works of an artist, desire to grace his name with the utmost honours of his muse, he has a right to name him, either as a painter, or, in the sister art, as a sculptor, at his will, even two thousand years before he was born, as appropriately as feign a name for the occasion. Besides who can prove that a famous sculptor of the name of Julio Romano, did not exist at the time of the Delphic Oracle? Thus two chief objections against Shakespeare's anachronisms may be defended; and others may be also defended by a parity of reasoning.

An accomplished judge like yourself in these learned matters, cannot allow of the slightest incongruity being called a minor offence. All must be equally offensive

to you. On the other hand a man of confined knowledge may not be offended at any, however gross, because he does not perceive it. But between you and that man there is a numerous class, readers as well as auditors, ready to detect a glaring error, but blind to that which requires your particular course of study. Thus, as to Shakespeare's mention of turkeys in the reign of Henry the Fourth, when you are well aware that such birds were not introduced into England till the reign of Henry the Eighth, and as to other such slight and casual contradictions to facts, they can offend none but antiquaries like yourself; and it remains to be proved that a theatre ought to be a museum, with every article brought into it duly labelled and described according to catalogue.

You may here observe that the numerous class, the million, may hereafter become, which is possible, as critical as yourself. Then farewell to poetry! Every Jack will hiss like a goose at that which most delights him, his own erudite discovery of a fault, though in the most questionable shape. Macbeth will not then dare to say, speaking of the absence of the sun from our hemisphere, "Now o'er the one half world,"* because a thane of Glamis cannot be supposed to have known that our planet is spherical. Where will the objectors stop? Where will they draw the line beyond which the poets dare not pass? We had bet-

* The scrupulous scholastic Addison proceeds no farther than the seventh line of his *Cato* without an error of precisely the same description :

" Already Cæsar
Has ravaged more than half the globe."

ter throw down our pens at once, if we find that our protest is made in vain against too strict a boundary. You would strip our language of many a striking metaphor, and of many a happy illustration, because they may be founded on discoveries too recent by half a century. Our vocabulary itself would be reduced to a puny size, by its being forbidden, in severe propriety, when dramatizing a story in Grecian history, to use any word except such as may be a literal translation of some ancient Greek word. Nay, will it not be pronounced the height of ignorance to represent a Grecian or a Roman speaking English?

Thus far in defence. I will now speak in approval of what you are pleased to condemn. Do not believe that our occasional subversions of chronology, as you term them, are made either from ignorance or heedlessness. They have frequently been a subject of discussion at the Mermaid; where Ben Jonson himself, who began by taking your side of the argument, has yielded so far as to allow their introduction, now and then, in comedy, or among comic characters in the mixed drama. You may remark that of late years they are rarely found in tragic or serious scenes; never, perhaps, without intention. The opinion of the Mermaid is to this effect.

Dramatic representation, like painting, appeals in an eminent degree to the imagination. In proportion as we draw the chain closer between distant times and the present day, we attract the sympathy of an audience. Human nature, though never varying in its essential properties and distinctions, is, however, capable of so many modifications, caused by

remote and national manners, that it may not always be instantly recognized. Now, in a theatre, instant recognition is necessary; for, if once the audience attempts to argue itself into sympathy, the poet's claim to rigid truth will be unavailing. That very fact of making foreigners, or our British ancestors in Lear's time, speak in our own language, is an approximation to our sympathy, while it is absurd to our understanding. If, moreover, it is possible to drop a modern allusion or fact, well nigh unperceived in the dialogue, it will have the magical effect of linking the past with the present through the imagination, even with the veriest bookworm, for the moment, and we care not for his after cool reflection. Great art is requisite for the management of these linkings together; and many are of opinion that they are best left to the comic characters, because with them a laugh, should it chance to be raised, passes for nothing against the poet, while it assists his purpose. Every thing in the drama, saving the grand principles of human nature, is fiction wrought by art into verisimilitude, not into absolute identity. While the language must breathe of the very time and place wherein it is supposed to be spoken, it must be poetical and picturesque; and, to agree with it, an air of poetry should be thrown over the scenery. At some future period, should the stage have appropriate scenery as well as dresses, the aid of the antiquary will be welcome. There will then be no fear of the minutest attention to propriety; the more accurate the more instructive; the link between reality and fiction will never be broken, as long as the stage lamps are not

mistaken for daylight. But the same accuracy must not always attend the dresses; our sense of delicacy would sometimes be offended; sometimes too close an adherence to costume would be misunderstood. For instance, you have told me that a Venetian lady must not leave her house unless attired in black, yet Desdemona in mourning, for so would her dress be interpreted, would contradict the text. In the same way a departure from the exactness of chronology in language is necessary, as well as for an appeal to the imagination. If ever the time should arrive when critics insist on the laws of the drama being the same as those of history, the poet who has no opportunity of inserting a paragraph or a note, by way of explanation as he goes on, may meet with the applause of a few, but never of the many. The effect of the drama constructed on such rules would be too cold, too distant, too abstract. Man's everyday feelings could not be raised, could not be approached. Imagination would resent its being left in so inert a state; and though the understanding might have nothing to argue against those laws, passion would be faintly excited, and the drama would rather become a poem, possibly an interesting one, not a scene of active, busy life, in which, with one accord, we heartily sympathize.

Dramatists, I have said, may be likened in their office to painters; and to the latter we really owe the example of appealing, through inconsistencies, to the imagination. Those who have had the happiness of beholding the works of Raphael, Titian, (and others, not yet a hundred years old,) know how much they have contrived to connect past events with things of

interest in their time, and even with actual portraits of living men. This may have first arisen from a sense of religion ; the nativity having been as much to an Italian modern family, as to any other family at the actual time ; and therefore we see portraits of individuals, in their Venetian or other costume, kneeling before the Virgin and Child. Having thus discovered a truth in what you would call a false chronology, they carried it to other subjects as a means of uniting our present feelings with the past ; and taught us that there is an imaginative chronology, superior, in its moral effects, to a cold, calculating, and barren doctrine.

This argument, put into the mouth of one of our old poets, which has run to a greater length than I intended, would of course be utterly unavailing with a mere antiquary. It may not be convincing to any but a poet ; but every one will perhaps acknowledge a shadow of reason in it, which is enough for a poet ; when his aim is instruction of a higher nature than that of dates and facts. On this principle, the meeting of Dido and Æneas has been commended, and rightly so ; but the same critics ought not to blow hot and cold with Virgil and our old dramatists.

I have avoided alluding to the confusion of times, places, and manners, in the romance writers of Elizabeth's reign ; a confusion not to be excused. Even our latest and great romance writer, Sir Walter Scott, who constantly dins his antiquarian knowledge into our ears, has ten to one more faults of this nature than can be pointed out in Shakespeare ; only it is not the

fashion to say so; or his pretension to accuracy has prevented his readers' suspicions. I will not assert, as an antiquary has informed me,—“Sir Walter Scott is never entirely correct in costume;” but I have noticed in him a multiplicity of errors.

Modern critics are equally fastidious in pronunciation, To this I give my hearty approval, provided they tax not their forefathers with ignorance for following rules different from their own. It has nothing to do with Shakespeare's learning, nor with that of his fellows; it can only affect their taste. The old poets, when they introduced a foreign name into their writings, accented it according to what they conceived the euphony of the language. This cannot be doubted; because the old translators, certainly good scholars themselves, in turning the classic poets into English verse, have chosen to alter many names in their syllabic quantity; of which several examples have been brought forward by Stevens. Thus if Marlowe, a translator of Ovid, was the author of *Titus Andronicus*, he did not choose to call it Andronīcus. I speak of pronunciation chiefly on account of Dr. Farmer's having accused Shakespeare of scholastic ignorance in saying Stephāno in *The Merchant of Venice*, and pretending, without any authority, that Ben Jonson had afterwards taught him better when the *Tempest* was written, as there the name is pronounced Stephāno. This is incredible; because, to be consistent, Ben Jonson himself, in his *Volpone*, should not have pronounced Voltōre, Voltōre. This name, he lets us know, is the Italian for “Vulture;” , no, in that case, it ought to be Avoltore. But,

whether as an Italian word or name, an Italian ear is gratingly offended by such lines as the following :

“ Sir, Signor Voltore is come this morning.”

“ What then did Voltore, the lawyer, here ?”

“ Thou, Voltore, to take away the scandal.”

Ben Jonson, therefore, the pretended corrector of pronunciation, was equally at fault with his neighbours ; but, as he boldly declared himself a scholar, no one has dared to arraign him for ignorance. Most probably Shakespeare disapproved of his first pronunciation of the name Stephano, or he yielded to the true one, because it might have become the usual one. By the same rule, we should say Venīce, Florēnce, Milān, Alexandrīa, and mispronounce, to our ears, a hundred other names. Worse than all, Romeo and Desdemona would be converted into Romēo and Desdēmōna. But enough of these trifles.

We are sometimes told, in a tone of censure, if not in direct terms, that few of the fables of Shakespeare's dramas were of his own invention, and that those he has selected, if not historical, are improbable. The same may be said of all dramatic authors, ancient or modern ; those whose works have been successful, from Æschylus down to our own time, as far as tragedy and the serious drama are concerned ; and so it will continue to be said of them ; because originality, in its strictest sense, and probability, both equally tend to weaken our interest in dramatic works. As this assertion, at first sight, may appear paradoxical, I will say a few words on both heads in explanation.

First, in respect to originality of fable for tragedy and the serious drama. We laugh freely at a comic story, regardless of its authenticity; but we are more chary of our tears, and can hardly be persuaded to shed them at events which we know to be wholly fictitious. Children are strenuous on this subject. Tell them an affecting tale, and at the moment you think they are "beguiled of their tears," they are apt to advance the question of—"But is it true?"—when if you assure them it is so, the tears spring from their eyes. But if the answer should be, "No, no; it is only a story!"—they instantly clear up their countenances, and you are at liberty to kill all the personages of your tale, in the most pathetic manner, without once exciting their compassion. In this respect, as in many others, "men are but children of a larger growth."

Another peculiarity in our nature is, that we willingly consent to weep at a tragedy, provided we are told it is founded, no matter how slightly, on a fact; nor are we anxious to inquire into the incongruousness of the superstructure with the foundation. We reconcile our minds to the whole of it, on the principle that there may well be more than one way of telling the same story. Not that we are really deceived; but we find just enough to satisfy our self-love that we are not entirely imposed on, and that the sorrow we are tempted to express may, in some degree, be justified. In all works of imagination, especially in those represented bodily before us on the stage, we possess a strange mixture of the love of facts, and of a willingness, indeed an eagerness, to be deceived.

All we claim is some little resting-place for our faith; if more can be obtained, so much the better; but a little whereon to lean our elbow is sufficient. We want merely an excuse to be interested, and to have our passions moved.

For this purpose it is enough for a poet, after having invented a fable, to connect it with some known name in history; or, if he has not invented it, he appeals to the original tale, printed long ago, which, of course, must have been grounded on fact. "I love a ballad in print," says Mopsa, "for then we are sure they are true." More or less, men of education, as well as the common run of audiences, are like the simple-hearted Mopsa. The tragic poets of Greece were right, in order to fix the attention of the people, and to interest them highly, instead of creating new heroes and new events, to go back to their heroic age for fables, in which there was a traditional faith; and Shakespeare and the rest were right, for the same reason, in dramatizing history or tradition, ballads or tales, English or foreign. It was by no means necessary that the audience should be previously acquainted with the story; it was sufficient if something existed, which might be talked of as its groundwork. A ballad was the origin of the tragedy of *Douglas*; no one can doubt but that the knowledge of that fact, even among those who have neither read the ballad nor seek to read it, affords additional pathos to the tragedy; while few indeed have inquired into the truth of that same ballad.

When Shakespeare dramatized portions of the Roman or English history, it may be almost said he

was writing upon oath, so correctly does he follow the course of events, according to his authorities. But when he adopted a tale, he would, as his taste and judgment directed, strike out a part, invent other incidents, bring forward other persons on the scene, alter or entirely subvert the catastrophe, and all this for merely the serious part of his play; while the comic part, most artfully connected and apparently inseparable from the other, was generally his own invention. If we consider this properly, together with his amazing invention of characters, for which he seldom received more than a hint, and oftener nothing, he may be styled nearly as original in his fables as in his poetry. We look into the Italian tales in vain for any of his characters. Othello and Shylock, for instance, are there no more than a Moor of a noble nature, and a Jew who hated Christians. Cinthio Geraldini and Ser Giovanni, who told the stories of the *Moor of Venice* and the *Jew of Venice*, did no more than furnish the barest skeletons. Our English bard clothed them with flesh and blood.

Respecting improbability, so fastidiously exclaimed against, I have little else to say except that it is the very life and soul of fiction. When we turn to works of imagination, we are not satisfied with occurrences which belong to any body and to every day in the week. A common story at the theatre, or in a poem, or in a novel, is not to our purpose; we want excitement, and we insist on meeting with something uncommon; and the uncommon is sure to approach, if not trespass on the regions of improbability. The legends of the family of CEdipus, and of the bloody

house of Atreus, are fully as improbable as the legend of King Lear and his three daughters. An improbability can only be an event which, though possible, is not likely to happen ; yet with this definition, we cannot object to any possible story whatever. It has been truly remarked that events in common life have surpassed the wildest possible fictions ; yet still we unreasonably object to a poet's fictions. What can be more improbable than the strangest, and therefore the most striking and interesting parts of history ? How unlikely, we may say, is it, that a woman, in man's attire, should pass, during a lengthened period, for a man ! but we know that women, thus disguised, have passed their whole lives. The most improbable thing in Shakespeare is the continually mistaking of twin brothers for each other ; yet there has been performed in Plymouth Market, for the last fifty years, a *Comedy of Errors*, never ending, still beginning, arising from the resemblance of twin brothers, both in the same costume as butchers ; their very wives are frequently puzzled ; and they maintain, as old men, their original counterpart resemblance. A similar comedy has been performed for many years in the dock-yard at Leghorn ; where the twins, to avoid their roguery, are not paid their wages unless they appear together. And I have been credibly informed that a mother was obliged to put a ribbon round one daughter's neck, in order to distinguish her from her twin sister, even when they were ten years old. All this is beyond the errors created by the two Antipholises, and the two Dromios, because with them no one is aware of the existence of twin likenesses.

Possibility stands in need of strong evidence in a court of justice, not in a theatre. The latter contains an assembly of persons ready and eager to yield up their imaginations, and to regard every event credible that is possible, for the purpose of receiving delight and instruction. Nor is this strange, when the same double purpose is gained in *Æsop's* fables, where we have to encounter the absolute impossibility of conversation between brutes or vegetables. In representation, however, we cannot admit of what cannot be conceived, unless in a Christmas pantomime. Yet, while we listen willingly and gladly to uncommon and startling histories of our fellow men, the dramatist dares not, with impunity, once shock our faith in human nature. We consent to view ourselves reflected in other attire, a king's or a beggar's, on the eve of happiness or of being murdered, but we cannot bear to see ourselves distorted. If the offence of the dramatist is openly visible, we turn away with contempt; and even if there is an underground factitious feeling, to which our hearts cannot respond, in vain is the beauty or the splendour of the verse, in vain the moral or the spirit-stirring business of the scene. Such works like every thing else factitious, may last during the fashion of the day; the fashion gone, the works die with it. On this rock of false feeling, Dryden, as a dramatist, was wrecked. In a less degree, compared to Dryden's tragedies, the *Cato* of Addison offends; and that noblest effort of the English muse, as it was once called by Voltaire (though his countrymen are not now of his opinion) has sunk nearly into oblivion, weighed down by its hyperbolical

characters, and unnatural, because continued, pomp of diction. By such means, during the last century, many historical facts have become incredible on the stage. Truth has been disguised in tinsel till she could not be recognized. It is of no use to appeal to authority for our subject, unless we treat it with verisimilitude. Thus, bereaved of the true dramatic art, the most probable circumstances may become prodigies; while, with that art, the supernatural itself is natural.

Dr. Johnson's *Preface* again supplies me with a passage entirely to my purpose. "Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion; even where the agency is supernatural, the dialogue is level with life. Other writers disguise the most natural passions and the most frequent incidents; so that he who contemplates them in the book will not know them in the world: Shakespeare approximates the remote and familiarizes the wonderful; the event which he represents will not happen; but, if it were possible, its effects would probably be such as he has assigned; and it may be said, that he has not only shown human nature as it acts in real exigencies, but as it would be found in trials to which it cannot be exposed."

There are other parts of the *Preface* which seem to have been written with regret that our great poet did not compose tragedies similar to the Doctor's own *Irene*. The above passage must have been written when warm from the perusal of some scenes which had prompted it. When he spoke from the impression of

the moment, or from impulse, he gave us energetic truth; but he had no cool judgment—it was cold prejudice. For this reason, the best, almost the only valuable part of his works is, thanks to Boswell, his conversation. Readers cannot always distinguish between his unadulterated feelings and his cold prejudices. His twofold character, a positive and vacillating criticism, a love of nature and of artificial authority, a kindness in practice, and a stern, unbending, theoretical rigour, formed a being unfit to pronounce judgment on poets. All have been injured by him, but, most of all, the greatest. In a paper, No. 168 of the *Rambler*, on “Poetry debased by mean expressions,” he points out that, as a fault in Shakespeare, without which the high praise bestowed on his dramatic art, in the passage I have just quoted, could not have been deserved. While bringing forward my reasons for differing from his criticism, I shall be explaining what I desire in reference to the commendation contained in his *Preface*.

“Shakespeare has no heroes.” If his characters were always to speak and act in an elevated manner, heroes they would be, and not men. Addison’s characters, and those of Racine, and of other French poets, move before us aloof from the common desires and the common feelings of mankind. However we may admire, we cannot sympathize with them. It was part of Shakespeare’s cunning to represent characters like ourselves, with the same wants as well as passions, the same petty griefs, as well as deep-rooted sorrows, and surrounded with everything pertaining to man. He tells us himself, “One touch of nature

makes the whole world kin;" and he was constantly fulfilling his own precept. Thus his greatest men talk of eating and drinking, as if they had verily mouths to eat and drink: Othello complains of a head-ache, as if his head was humanly subject to pain; Prince Henry, the future conqueror of France, asks, when reproached for feeling fatigued in his dignified situation,—“Doth it not show vilely in me to desire small beer?”—and we meet with the instruments of domestic life, in plain household words, absolutely or metaphorically, as if they were needful or interesting to us. None of all which, to the boast of our neighbours in the last century, can be found throughout the whole range of the French classic theatre, exclusively composed of heroes and heroines, not men and women. The lines objected to, as “poetry debased,” are—

“Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell!
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes;
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, *Hold, hold!*”

The learned lexicographer first finds fault with the word *dun*, because it is a “low” expression, “seldom heard but in the stable,” and is to be treated with “contempt.” I should be sorry if so good a word were confined to the stable; it cannot well be spared from the works of our best authors. Milton uses it in the sense of his own “darkness visible,”—“In the dun air sublime.”

His next “low” word is *knife*. He terms it “an instrument used by butchers and cooks in the meanest

employments ;” and asks, “ who does not, at last, from the long habit of connecting a knife with sordid offices, feel aversion rather than terror ?” Of course he would have chosen *dagger*, as a grander word ; but it would not be so appropriate in this situation, in the soliloquy of a woman, who does not appear to wear a dagger. Besides, the connexion of the homely word *knife* with so awful a murder as that of an old man in his sleep, brings the image in a more familiar, and, therefore, in a more horrible manner, to our minds.

But can it be credited, without turning to the *Rambler*, that Dr. Johnson presumed to criticize these lines, not knowing by whom they are spoken ? According to him Macbeth utters them, not his wife ; and their value is certainly degraded, on more than one consideration, by giving them to him.

Lastly, the critic demands : “ Who, without some relaxation of his gravity, can hear of the avengers of guilt *peeping through a blanket* ?” My answer is, that I can ; because I do not attach a more ludicrous meaning to the word *peep*, than in this line of Pope :

“ Hills peep o’er hills, and Alps on Alps arise.”

But, agreeably to his dictionary, the word *peep*, in its second sense, is thus defined : “ To look slyly, closely, or curiously ; to look through any crevice ;” and he then gives Shakespeare’s line as an illustration of this second sense of the word ! Who but himself could have supposed there was a hole in the blanket ? Any one who chooses, while reading the line, to think of playing bo-peep with that emblem of gravity, Dr. Johnson, will doubtless experience some “ relaxation”

of his own gravity, and he may wish, with him, perhaps, it were "gaze through the curtain of the dark," or, in mightier Johnsonian phrase,—“direct a glance of perquisition through the fleecy-woven tegument of the tenebrosity.” As for the word *blanket*, let it be noticed that Lady Macbeth, not her husband, had, at that moment, on being informed, “The King comes here to night,” determined on murdering him in his bed. “Top-full of direct cruelty,” in the anticipation of this deed, her thoughts occupied in the very act of stabbing her guest in his bed, she naturally, and consequently with propriety, takes a metaphor from it in the word *blanket*. Dr. Johnson strongly felt the power of these lines, but quarrelled with the means employed to produce it, and altogether misunderstood the meaning and value of the words. He boasted of this criticism when he was editor; for, in a note, he says, “On this passage there is a long criticism in the *Rambler*.” In this, and many other cases, his authority is like that of a cook, with her finger and thumb at the neck of a pullet; only, instead of catering for us, he would destroy, or contaminate, our food.

By the occasional skilful application of a common every-day expression, the application of a household word, the mingling of the conveniences or wants of life with deeds of death, our imagination, while reading Shakespeare, is so forcibly enthralled. Had the old King been described as reposing on a stately couch, after the fatigue of his journey, we could not have sympathized with his fate so much as when we find him, like ourselves, sleeping in a bed, with sheets

and blankets. Such is at least a portion of Shakespeare's magic. To find fault with it, is to wish to be disenchanted.

Let it not be said, that, like a man with his mistress, I cannot see a defect in our national poet. I am now occupied in his defence; but at the proper season I should not hesitate in pointing out whatever is faulty to demonstration: and here, while speaking of his dramatic art, I blame his forgetfulness of time. Othello, for example, talks as if he had passed the honeymoon, or nearly so; yet it is plain, from the context, that he kills his wife the night after his nuptials. This was, originally, a criticism by Rymer; and no ingenuity can controvert it. Still, the passion of the scenes is so mighty, that neither audience nor reader would be aware of it, unless there were a Rymer to notice it. That very passion had doubtless blinded the poet himself to the fact; because, had he perceived it, two or three slight alterations, not affecting the business of the scenes, would have annulled the objection. That this may no more be adduced as an argument of his carelessness, which I will not allow, I will instance similar failings of memory in other great men, which are more frequent than many may suppose. Cervantes commits numerous blunders, but his authority may not be considered to the purpose; De Foe, however, the most matter-of-fact of all novelists, does the same. It was not until I had several times read the works of Fielding, who affected undeniable precision, that I perceived he had wonderfully failed in his progress of time. Omitting minor errors in his other novels, I will mention an almost incredible

one in his *Tom Jones*, where he takes upon himself to divide his books into certain periods of time, with more, as he says, than historical exactness. Thus the incidents at the close of Book V occur, we are distinctly told, "in the latter end of June;" Book VI contains "about three weeks;" Book VII "three days;" Book VIII "about two days;" yet in this very Book VIII, when the month of July could not be passed, we are gravely told, in a parenthesis, ("as it was now mid-winter,") and the story proceeds regularly onward through frost and snow! No one can believe this was carelessness in the greatest novelist, since he was continually priding himself on exactness; nor can I think the greatest dramatist was careless, seeing he was more exact, on most matters, than the hypercritics will generally allow. A fiction, interwoven with many stirring incidents, is apt to mislead the soundest recollection, whether we write it for instruction, or depose to it in a witness-box.

A foreigner, Schlegel, following Morgann's critical *Essay*, told us,—“To me Shakespeare appears a profound artist, and not a blind and wildly-luxuriant genius.” Upton spoke rather of his poetic art, while there he found great fault in his crowded metaphors. But, with deference to Upton, who has written so well on Shakespeare, it is in the nature of passion to hurry metaphor on metaphor; therefore, what would be a fault in a didactic or descriptive poem, may be beautiful in a drama; a distinction that is seldom made. Morgann had spoken in vain, and we listened to Schlegel with surprise; for we had been accustomed to consider our national poet as almost more than akin

to nature, and independent on art. Probably we have by this time learned that the closest imitations of nature must be the highest efforts of art. To argue otherwise is to forsake the philosophical and easy, for the preternatural and the perplexing. Again, rather than attribute his excellence to its right cause, the editors have chosen to ascribe its larger portion to a variety of accidents. No doubt accidents improved his mind, as every man's mind may be improved ; but there is no reason for our ascribing a greater number of fortunate accidents to him than to another. His intellectual superiority may itself have been a consequence of some unnoticed thing in the chain of events ; nay, he might not have been born, according to Godwin, if Alexander the Great, about two thousand years before, had not happened to bathe in the Cydnus.

I willingly leave the chain of events, and all that is termed accident in this world, because they are beyond my comprehension. When I open the pages of Shakespeare, my reason sees nothing but the product of a superior mind, aided and strengthened by the keenest observation and the deepest study. Yes, one thing more, which may, however, be said to belong essentially to a superior mind, and without which, I verily believe, his name could scarcely have descended to us,—a spirit of goodness within him. Had he not happily possessed a kindness of nature, an inexhaustible charity, an ardent love of all created things ; but, in their stead, a discontented or a malevolent view of his fellow-creatures, how basely would he have fallen from his present height ! Such a distraction of the mind, would either have cramped his genius, or

utterly destroyed it. In vain then would have been his dramatic art, and knowledge of stage effect, which none has equalled,—in vain his experience with mankind, his books, his poetry. As it is, while he surveys nature neither with an evil eye nor with austerity, he teaches us to read “sermons in stones, and good in every thing;” to respect all opinions which are built on reflection and sincerity; to know our passions truly, lest they should mislead us; to look with charity on the failings or mistakes of others; to find, if possible, some excuse even for the vicious, while we most condemn vice; to feel certain that we cannot be happy while we do a wrong to another; and, when ourselves are wronged, to forgive an enemy, if he is penitent,—not coldly, but with a brother’s warmth. The grand “magic in the web” of his writings is his doctrine. The first requisite for the art of poetry is universal kindliness. Humanly speaking, he is our greatest teacher as well as our greatest delight. With other poets something is wanting, or something uncongenial is presented; whatever chord he strikes,—and by turns, he strikes on all—it is sure to harmonize with our best affections. The more he is read, the more he is, not only admired, but loved. Every Englishman knows something of his works, but, if I may be allowed to judge of others by myself, or by those with whom I have conversed, no one knows enough.

HE NEVER WAS A FLATTERER.

REGARDING, as Shakespeare has contended, that the conferring of merited praise is an honest action, and that praise is flattery only when addressed to the undeserving, I have argued that the five Poems to his friend, are free from flattery. It now remains to be proved that he has never, throughout his works, been guilty of personal adulation. This is necessary, as the contrary has been either boldly stated, or recklessly implied by many.

The principal charge against him has been made by the most prejudiced and heedless of his editors, Dr. Johnson, in his note on Cranmer's speech at the end of *Henry the Eighth*. Here is the note.

“These lines, to the interruption by the king, seem to have been inserted at some revisal of the play, after the accession of King James. If the passage, included in crotchets, be left out, the speech of Cranmer proceeds in a regular tenour of prediction and continuity of sentiments; but, by the interposition of the new lines, he first celebrates Elizabeth's successor, and

then wishes he did not know that she was to die; first rejoices at the consequence, and then laments the cause. Our author was at once politic and idle; he resolved to flatter James, but neglected to reduce the whole speech to propriety; or perhaps intended that the lines inserted should be spoken in the action, and omitted in the publication, if any publication ever was in his thoughts. Mr. Theobald has made the same observation."

This accusation wholly rests on the belief that Shakespeare was the author of the lines within the crotchets; against which there are several objections.

The lines being so placed shows them separable from the legitimate text. Shakespeare, though he has written obscurely, never committed a like incontinuity of purpose, never was so awkward, and therefore he ought not to be supposed the author of a passage, allowed to be, as it is marked, an interpolation. There is no congeniality with the character of his verse, — nothing with the character of Cranmer's speech, which is an outpouring of prophecies, in short simple sentences, as if each was uttered in a single breath; whereas these lines are harsh, long-winded, and involved.

It is also taken for granted that the play was first produced in the reign of Elizabeth, for which there is not a shadow of authority, except that her reign is eulogized in it; while our sole authority is direct in favour of its having been first produced in 1613, ten years after her death.

Malone is extremely puzzled upon this subject, discussing it at great length, in his *Chronology*. He

cannot comprehend how the play could have been written during Elizabeth's life; yet he is willing to suppose that such was the case, on account of its high compliment on her reign. He has, however, the evidence of Sir Henry Wotton, who saw it represented in 1613, and who described it as a "new play." In this dilemma, he chooses to think it possible it was palmed, in that year, on the public as a "new play," while it was merely a revival with a new name, *All is true*; but he brings forward nothing in support of this notion. Without conjecturing improbabilities, why should we not believe, according to the account we have received, that it was first acted in 1613, and that the flattery to king James was not in the original manuscript, but inserted by another hand?

Thus every difficulty will be removed; and my evidence is strong for such a belief. The passage, *not* within the crotchets,

"She shall be, to the happiness of England,
An *aged* princess; * * * but she must *die*;
She must: the saints must have her!"

—this passage, without taking into account the outrage of calling the vain Elizabeth *aged* to her face, supposing the play was performed in her reign, (which Malone, in strange simplicity, thinks would not have offended her at the age of seventy!) imagined the queen's death during her life, and was little short of high treason—probably nothing short, in her ears. Malone slurs over this fact, which is everything to the argument. The play, therefore, could not have been brought forward during the life of that queen; and

thus the charge against Shakespeare for flattery towards her, is annihilated. The dead cannot be flattered; but her memory was, we well know, dearly cherished; and nothing could be a more grateful subject to the audience than a eulogy on her reign. Besides which, we may reasonably suppose it was a grateful subject to the poet himself.

It now remains to clear him from the charge of flattery towards her successor James. When this play was produced in 1613, Shakespeare had, it is conjectured, retired to Stratford, and probably he forwarded it to London for performance. This is certain, Ben Jonson was in London at that time; since he witnessed the conflagration of the Globe Theatre, after one of the performances of this very play, in 1613. To this certainty a supposition, a well-grounded one, by Malone, has been added, that the play was got up under his direction, especially the pageants and processions, for which his knowledge of costume and heraldry, acquired with Inigo Jones in the decorations of the *Masques at Court*, rendered him the fittest person in the theatre. We are told by Sir Henry Wotton, that the decorations and dresses were splendid; and the king himself, and the prince palatine, were no doubt present at one of the performances, because we know they frequented the Globe Theatre during that year, chiefly, it appears, for the sake of witnessing our great poet's dramas. Looking forward to this visit of majesty, when the new play of *Henry the Eighth*, or, as its title then was, *All is true*, was to be performed, we may easily imagine that Ben Jonson, the most barefaced and fulsome court-flatterer among all our

poets, was in no small degree troubled at discovering there was a long eulogy on the memory of Elizabeth, without a word in favour of the reigning monarch, the jealous James. If Shakespeare was absent, it was an omission to be supplied by some one on the spot ; and if he was in London, it is more likely that he reasonably and honestly refused to praise a king before his reign was concluded, than that he should so awkwardly have foisted in these lines of unblushing adulation. Unblushing I term it, as James is placed on an equality with his predecessor, here so magnificently extolled ; though Ben was capable, in his *Masques*, of placing his glory above her's.

I am arriving, it will be seen, at the conclusion that this disputed passage in crotchets was written by Ben Jonson, nor am I the first who has expressed the same opinion. There can be no doubt but that the prologue and epilogue to this play were written by him ; of this I felt assured, from internal evidence, from the matter, the feeling, and the very intonation of the lines, before I was aware that Dr. Johnson and Dr. Farmer had, on similar grounds, long since arrived at the same conclusion. Judging in the same manner, from the peculiarity of thought, style, and composition, I feel certain that all within the crotchets was written by none but Ben Jonson ; and those conversant with his poetry will, by an attentive perusal, trace him in every line. For those who know little of his works, I will place, immediately following the crotcheted flattery, passages from his *Entertainments*, and *Masques*, wherein his theme is the royal James ; when a resemblance, almost amounting to identity,

will be perceived. It is a pity I could not find the "phoenix"—nothing else is wanting. The passages in italics will be found counterparts, besides the similarity in expression throughout,—I cannot call it feeling.

[“ Nor shall this peace sleep with her : but as when
The bird of *wonder* dies, the maiden phoenix,
Her ashes new create another heir,
As great in admiration as herself;
So shall she leave her blessedness to one,
(When heaven shall call her from this cloud of darkness)
Who, from the sacred ashes of her honour,
Shall star-like rise, as great in *fame* as she was,
And so stand fix'd : peace, plenty, love, truth, terror,
That were the servants to this chosen infant,
Shall then be his, and like a vine grow to him ;
Wherever the bright sun of heaven shall shine,
His honour and the greatness of *his name*
Shall be, and make *new nations* : he shall flourish,
And, like a mountain cedar, reach his branches
To all the plains about him :— our children's children
Shall see this, and bless heaven.

King.

Thou speakest *wonders*.”]

“ But all these spurs* to virtue, seeds of praise,
Must yield to this that comes. Here's one will raise
Your glory more.”

“ A splendid sun, shall never set,
But here shine fix'd.”

“ As bright and fixed as the arctick *star*.”

“ Within his proper virtue hath he placed
His guards 'gainst fortune, and *there fix'd fast*
The wheel of chance.”

* The actions of Elizabeth.

*“Here are kingdoms mix’d
And nations join’d, a strength of empire fix’d.”*

*“His name
Strike upon heaven, and there stick his fame.”*

“His country’s wonder, hope, love, joy, and pride
How well doth he become the royal side
Of this erected and broad-spreading tree,
Under whose shade may Britain ever be !
And from this branch may thousand branches more
Shoot o’er the main, and knit with every shore !”*

Having exculpated our poet from the commission of such Ben Jonsonian language, I hope every one will draw his pen through it, and that future editors will not continue the interpolation.

In vain I look for a second passage in his works which can be construed into a like charge. Elegant compliments he has certainly paid to both these sovereigns during their lives; but they are few, honest-minded, and gentlemanly, as far removed as truth from flattery, being on points that could not admit of contradiction at the period they were written.

The first of these is paid to Elizabeth, simply on her fair complexion and virgin state, and is the most delicate and poetical compliment that, on any occasion, ever entered the mind of man. I mean that beautiful passage in *Midsummer Night’s Dream* :—

*“That very time I saw (but thou could’st not)
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all arm’d : a certain aim he took*

* The heir-apparent.

At a fair Vestal, throned by the west,
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts :
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quench'd in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon ;
And the imperial vot'ress passed on,
In maiden-meditation, fancy-free."

This is the only tribute of his muse to the virgin-queen. His exaltation of the Tudors above the house of York, in some respects contrary to our view of history, is nothing to the purpose. Englishmen, in his day, while looking back on the wars of the red and white roses, must have felt thankful to the Tudors, in spite of the now acknowledged unworthiness of their two Henrys. Then, not only did Shakespeare follow Holinshed, but also the original dramatist of the three parts of *Henry the Sixth*. In those plays the characters of Richard the Third and Henry the Seventh were ready made to his hands. Dr. Johnson might have spared his note, with its graceless expression of—"Shakespeare knew his trade"—on Henry the Sixth's prophetic speech at the sight of the youth Richmond, because, as Stevens has observed, the poet implicitly followed Holinshed in this particular. Besides, the representation of the first Tudor as a young faultless prince was dramatically necessary, in order to contrast him with the "hump-back'd tyrant." Had Henry the Seventh been drawn in his true character, the battle of Bosworth Field would have depressed the audience with unrelieved sorrow, witnessing nothing better than the dethronement of a daring tyrant for the accession of a subtle one. The

same necessity of contrast with Macbeth existed in the character of Banquo, the ancestor of James. Imagine Banquo as guilty as Macbeth, and the drama would be destroyed in its unity—its one-absorbing interest. Among Upton's remarks on *Macbeth*, he says,—“The variety of characters, with their different manners, ought not to be passed over in silence. Banquo was as deep in the murder of the king, as some of the Scottish writers inform us, as Macbeth. But Shakespeare, with great art and address, deviates from the history. By these means his characters have the greater variety; and he at the same time pays a compliment to King James, who was lineally descended from Banquo.” In this case, a doubt of Banquo's guilt was sufficient for a poet to acquit him, and thereby pay a compliment to his descendant, who was “so taken,” like Elizabeth with his dramas.

There are two more compliments to James, contained in *Macbeth*. That the witches should promise an interminable line of kings to the issue of Banquo, however pleasing to the ear of the reigning monarch, by no means trespassed beyond the bounds of fair compliment, since nothing at that period could well appear more secure. Had, indeed, the witches foretold the power, and wisdom, and what not, of one particular descendant, the first among those,—

“That two-fold balls and treble sceptres carry;”

then the promise would have swerved from compliment to flattery.

The other compliment is again not particular, but general to all English royalty. It is in a speech by

Malcolm at the court of Edward the Confessor, where he speaks of the King's miraculous cures of the evil.

“ A most miraculous work in this good king;
Which often since my here-remain in England,
I have seen him do. How he solicits heaven,
Himself best knows: but strangely visited people,
All swoln and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,
The mere despair of surgery, he cures;
Hanging a golden stamp about their necks,
Put on with holy prayers: and 'tis spoken,
To the succeeding royalty he leaves
The healing benediction.”

But this was a superstition, which lasted till the accession of George the First; and, be it noticed, though firmly believed in at the time Shakespeare wrote, he somewhat qualifies it with the words “*'tis spoken,*” and, thus qualified, he leaves it to the “succeeding royalty.” Shakespeare was not, like Ben Jonson, rewarded with a pension ~~from~~ royalty.

With the exception of the *Poems to his friend*, where Master William Herbert's worth and truth are celebrated, though with much after modification, there is no instance of Shakespeare's having ascribed to a living being any virtue, quality of the mind, or talent. His sonnet in the *Passionate Pilgrim*, where he mentions Spenser,

“ whose deep conceit is such,
As passing all conceit, needs no defence,”

was not published till after that poet's death. Such conduct is so far removed from flattery, that Mr. Leigh Hunt, in his *Indicator*, though with the best

feeling, seems to think it requires a defence. Intimate as we know he was with the great poets coeval with him, he has not bequeathed to us a line in commendation of one of them : nor did any one write a line in his commendation, except Spenser at the commencement of his career, during his life.* Considering the times in which he wrote, his compliments to royalty may have appeared strangely deficient in policy ; and, as if on principle, he avoided public praise towards his compeers. Undoubtedly he knew, that occupying, as he did, the highest rank as a poet, a word of approval from his pen would have been loudly echoed, not only from the quarter to which it was directed, but from every one who desired to be noticed by him. Now we well know, from their works, that the poets intimate with him, especially Ben Jonson, were profuse in encomiums on each other, on some indeed whose names are solely kept alive by the fact of verses being addressed to them.

Upon this forbearance, so extraordinary among literary men in all ages, I have many times reflected, and can arrive at no other conclusion than that Shakespeare acted on principle. The prostitution of praise offended him ; possibly the jealous expectation he observed around him of being lauded in return, precisely in proportion to the incense offered, offended him still more. If so, we must admire and love his honesty, his singleness of spirit, his wisdom ; though,

* An unknown person, Thomas Freeman, published a poor sonnet in his praise in 1614 : and two nameless rhymesters had previously alluded to his *Venus* and *Lucrece*.

by his want of that exciting praise towards others, we have lost a thousand contemporary addresses and notices of all kinds, which, taken together, might have supplied the place of a regular biographer.

Meres frequently introduced his name in what we may regard a favourable criticism on English literature in 1598; but what poet, among those surrounding him, has given him so much as a passing notice? That he had their good will we are assured; but it was of that species which works in silence. Drayton, a Warwickshire man, might have felt proud of him; but, whatever he felt, he did not express it. How happened it that no one, desirous himself of receiving a public honour from him, did not attempt to act on his generosity by penning a copy of verses in homage to his Muse? Was it because it was known he would neither be gratified, nor be induced to repay it in kind? This may well have been; and judging from the absence of verses addressed to him, I am inclined to believe that he disapproved of a fashion, sometimes disgraceful, seldom worthy; that his sentiments on this subject were not concealed; and that, among his circle, he was estimated as a man who disliked the publication of private opinion, and who was

“Averse alike to flatter or offend.”

HIS LOVE OF FAME.

FROM boyhood to nearly the age of thirty, I had studied Shakespeare without note or comment ; with nothing but Rowe's *Life*. When I began to read what so many have chosen to write of him and his works, it was like entering among a company whose sole conversation was directed to the merits of a dear friend. Such was the pleasure experienced by me at first ; and I was thankful for every illustration. But, to my surprise, it soon became evident that I had unconsciously been entertaining an opinion upon the character of the man extremely different from that of his public friends ; and in nothing did I so entirely disagree with them, as in their almost unanimous assertion of his disregard to fame ; an assertion grounded chiefly on the circumstance of his not having collected and printed his works, after his retirement from London.

The bare fact of his having left the care of editorship to others is far from being a proof that he was careless of fame. Without ascribing to him the common evils of procrastination, he might have purposed to write other, and, in his anticipation, better dramas, before the whole should be published ; he might have

been under an engagement, with his partners in the theatre, not to print them for a certain term of years, in order to increase their value as acting plays ; and, lastly, the strongest reason of all, and one which can be tolerably substantiated, an unexpected death might have put an end to his intention.

How comes it that no one has referred to the suddenness of his death ? His will is signed by an enfeebled hand, though it states he was “ in perfect health and memory ;” which may mean an apparent recovery from disease, believed in as a return to health, or, legally speaking, perfect health of mind. In less than a month after making his will, he was no more. It is useless to guess at the length of time he might have been ill ; but assuredly he was dead, to all literary intents, from the day he was struck by a mortal sickness, of whatever nature it might have been. Should it be argued that the declaration of “ perfect health” must be taken according to the letter, in spite of the appearance of his hand-writing, the suddenness of his death is certain. Perhaps the most likely solution is that, though no more than fifty-two years of age, he had been gradually sinking in strength before he made his will, and that he never recovered. Still the sinking in strength is equivalent to death, from the day he was sensible of it, as far as the labour of preparing his works for the press was concerned. But to put this question beyond reasonable dispute, his death was spoken of in London as sudden ; at least, which comes to the same thing, the sad news from Stratford was unexpected.

In proof of this, we have some verses to his memory

by his contemporaries. We find, in a sonnet signed "Hugh Holland," that the last line but one is,

"For though his line of life *went soon about.*"

J. M., supposed to have been John Marston, wrote a few lines on his works. They begin with

"We *wonder'd*, Shakespeare, that thou *went'st so soon*
From the world's stage to the grave's tyring-room."

But there are a few words, in the *Dedication* to the first folio, by Heminge and Condell, his personal friends and copartners, of strong implication that not only was his death unexpected, but that it was his intention to publish his dramas himself. His works, they say, "*outliving him, and he not having the fate, common with some, to be exequitor to his owne writings,*" &c. How can these expressions be interpreted otherwise than thus?—"It was his intention to be the executor of his own writings, but he was prevented by an untimely fate." And in still stronger words, they say in their *Preface*,—"It had beene a thing, we confesse, worthie to have been wished, that the author himself had lived to have set forth and overseen his owne writings; but since it hath been ordained otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you, &c."

As for the patience with which, we are told, he endured the piracies of booksellers, and the use they made of his name to works not written by him, this by no means proves that he was reckless of his productions. It may with equal force be said, that, resolved to publish his works himself, their piracies, and abuse of his name would, in the end, do him no

injury. But it is not clear that he was patient; all we know, is, that he and his partners were called the "grand possessors;" and that to steal from them any one of his plays, was so far difficult, as to be a matter of public boasting, as may be seen in the preface to the first edition, 1609, of *Troilus and Cressida*.

We have, therefore, good circumstantial evidence, that, had life been spared him a few years longer, he would have given us a complete edition of his works, possibly much corrected; and there is not a shadow of evidence to the contrary.

Let us turn to his works for farther information. It would be an easy task to bring forward a long list of quotations from his plays, proving the high value he set on a spotless reputation during life, and his love of an enduring fame; but every one of them might meet with the objection of its dramatic propriety, and consequent inapplicability to his own feelings. Were it necessary, such an objection might be withstood on general, if not on particular, grounds; but we need not go farther than his five *Poems to his friend*. Here his love of fame is amply shown, by the delight he expresses in his absolute security of it; witness the *Envoy* to the second poem :

" Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme," &c.

This reminds us of Horace's boast, "*Exegi monumentum ære perennius*:" but it is not a solitary expression of the kind; a vast many of the stanzas are in the same prophetic spirit. His assurance of a never-dying fame is as much his theme, as the perish-

able bloom of youth and personal beauty of his friend. In fact, these Poems almost prove too much; that he was in such certain possession of fame, as not to take any farther pains about it: but, as I observed, while speaking of these Poems, the boast is subservient to the compliment he is paying.

Here two curious questions offer themselves. Did he rely on the merits of these Poems alone, for immortal fame? or, on the excellence of his dramas—those written before 1598—for making any poem he was pleased to write immortal? Strange as it may appear, I would agree with the latter question, if one only were proposed; otherwise I would agree with the two together; and wish also to include his earnest, well-founded hope, at the time, of writing such tragedies as *Lear*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*. However slight may be the general estimation of these five Poems, they bear strong indications of having been written carefully; and I have no doubt they were estimated by the author next in value to his dramatic works;—and so indeed they are.

HIS MORAL CHARACTER.

“ And ’tis a kind of good deed, to say well.”

Henry the Eighth.

NEVER having seen more than the outside of Mr. Bowdler’s purified edition of Shakespeare, it is impossible for me to applaud him for having omitted the above line; but doubtless he has not permitted it to pollute the text. Nothing can be compared to it, in immorality, throughout his works. It has corrupted, and continues to corrupt, the whole country; for to what else can we impute the general observance of scrupulous words as substitutes for morality? to what else the perpetual “saying well,” as a proof of “a kind of good deed?” We go on the principle that no critical fault can be found in man, or woman either, which is undeniable in its wording. That line has done infinite mischief. We see it is put in the mouth of that father of the glorious Reformation, our eighth Harry, and we bow to his authority; never daring to mingle with the character of that pious king his peculiar private failings, because they cannot be spoken of without an injury to our sense of decorum. To be sure, we dearly love drinking; but

then it is candidly acknowledged ; and a few holdings forth against that filthy vice at a Temperance Society, are, considering the value of "saying well," ample atonement. As for other vices "which flesh is heir to," it is unanimously asserted, in our own country, that we are not so bad as our neighbours, which is much ; and we make astonishing amends for our peccadilloes by the purity of our conversation,—unless over our wine, when freedom of speech is an allowable zest to its flavour. What can be more edifying, in the way of "saying well," than our denouncements against the evil communication constantly kept up between us and the Continent ? Nothing ; though it would not be amiss to persuade the natives of those cities where we most congregate, that we are not worse than themselves,—a point in which we have hitherto failed. Besides, it would be as well if we could teach our foreign visitors, who cannot be supposed to understand all the valuable niceties of the language, that we are not, as they unhappily imagine, "the most immoral people in Europe." All this is manifestly to be laid to the account of that pernicious line from Shakespeare. If, by a culpable oversight, Mr. Bowdler has not erased it from his purified edition,—fie ! fie upon him ! It will be in vain for him to tell us that the very next sentiment, "And yet words are no deeds," annuls the previous pollution. By no means : we take the text without addition or diminution. Since it is so admirably adapted to our purposes, why destroy the integrity of the line ? Heaven forbid ! destroy integrity when it exists in words !

In this realm of cant, what can be said of Shakespeare's moral character? How arduous the attempt, particularly in one who has just spread forth his documents, proving that Shakespeare, a married man, had a mistress; and what, in the eyes of many husbands, must be still more inexcusable, - he set the shocking example of acknowledging it!

How to write on this subject, so as to please all parties, I am ignorant. My present vein, I feel, is not suitable to myself; nor am I aware that any good effect can be produced by sneering. I shall therefore proceed in seriousness.

Shakespeare's self-condemnation, in bitter terms, together with the fact of his having quitted his mistress for ever, renders it not only unnecessary, but culpable, to comment on his infidelity. Another subject connected with it indeed requires consideration; that of the publication of all the six Poems, to the probable injury of his wife's feelings. She might, however, have been a woman not to be hurt at the avowal of her husband's inconstancy, coupled, as it was, with remorse. Truly in our own time we have witnessed confessions from poets, similarly situated, and of a worse nature, because told unblushingly, while the public seemed to think nothing of it. But Shakespeare is not to be judged by a corrupt rule; and no one can pretend that he had any thing to do with the publication. The confused manner in which they were printed, rendering them wholly enigmatical for so long a period, exculpates the author from any share in the transaction. That the Poems were eventually intended for publication is certain, since they were to

immortalize the "only begetter of them;" but still, by the very context, their purpose was to tell the world, only when the Earl had become old, what wondrous beauty he possessed in his youth. Probably, had Shakespeare lived to publish his works, they would have been dedicated either to the Earl of Southampton or the Earl of Pembroke; if to the latter, these poems would have certainly been included, when the poet and his wife had become too old to give or take offence on so by-gone a subject.

Who then caused them to be printed? We are told by Meres that they existed, among his private friends, about eleven years before they were printed. With this intelligence, it is not difficult to account for their appearance at a time, in 1609, when any thing from the hand of the popular poet was valuable and eagerly sought. The Earl of Pembroke can hardly be conceived as the person who allowed them to be printed; no inducement except that of personal vanity could have led to such an action; and surely there was more than an equipoise to his vanity, in the relation of his unworthy conduct as a lad towards his professed friend, though some may be of opinion such a consideration is merely a subject for laughter. The mysterious indication of him under the designation of "Mr. W. H." looks indeed as if the Poems were surreptitiously obtained, and timidly dedicated to him. On the other hand, would Thorpe, the printer, when he might, in those superlative aristocratic days, have been crushed for his temerity, have dared the hazard of offending the most powerful nobleman at court?

Here I am led to canvass the supposition of Shake-

spcare's having lived unhappily with his wife. Hints to this effect had been thrown out, as is often the case when men have no foundation for what they fain would utter boldly; until at last Mr. Moore, who has had the dishonour of being echoed by Dr. Lardner, put them into a regular form in his *Life of Lord Byron*, and in the following words:

“By whatever austerity of temper, or habits, the poets Dante and Milton may have drawn upon themselves such a fate (a bad nuptial bed) it might be expected that, at least, the “gentle Shakespeare” would have stood exempt from the common calamity of his brethren. But, among the very few facts of his life that have been transmitted us, there is none more clearly proved than the unhappiness of his marriage. The dates of the birth of his children, compared with that of his removal from Stratford,—the total omission of his wife's name in the first draft of his Will, and the bitter sarcasm of the bequest by which he remembers her afterwards,—all prove beyond a doubt both his separation from the lady early in life, and his unfriendly feeling towards her at the close of it.

“In endeavouring to argue against the conclusion naturally to be deduced from this Will, Boswell, with a strange ignorance of human nature, remarks:—‘If he had taken offence at any part of his wife's conduct, I cannot believe he would have taken this petty mode of expressing it.’ ”

Mr. Moore's purpose was to uphold Lord Byron's character in the separation from his wife; and, in doing so, he has shown himself, far as my judgment reaches, less learned in human nature than Boswell.

Not every one is to be subject to Lord Byron's rule. Boswell judged truly from the best parts of our nature; while Mr. Moore, misled by his purpose, judged from our worst impulses—those which tempt men, like his lordship, to adopt a depressing or false sentimentality, or a scoffing and degrading merriment at the sight of their fellow-creatures. An attempt to draw a parallel between one of universal kindness, attaching to him an imagined "bitter sarcasm" at the close of his life, and another whose whole life was passed in bitter sarcasm, interrupted only by his pleasures, is utterly unavailing, even when one fashionable poet is arguing in extenuation of another fashionable poet's faults. From Shakespeare's works, and from every thing related of him by those who knew him, nothing can be gathered indicative of a paltry mind, nothing to induce us to believe that the calm tenour of his life could be ruffled by a petty mode of expressing his displeasure, least of all in the final act of it. To compare him, in the remotest degree, with Lord Byron—but, lest I should suffer the imputation of being like a special pleader, slurring over facts, I gladly examine into the circumstances which Mr. Moore has detailed, and which, by his statement, "clearly prove," and "beyond a doubt," his argument.

His removal from Stratford was compulsory from the moment he chose the stage for his profession. If he left his family at home, it is most probable that his limited means for their support at that time did not allow him to take them with him. Such a separation can no more be regarded as unkind than the absence

from home of any professional man, an officer in the army or the navy. At all events, tradition informs us that he frequently visited Stratford, which is extremely unlike the conduct of a husband utterly alienated from his wife; and we know, from his purchases of land, that his thoughts were centered in his native town. Tradition always needs some fact in confirmation, and here we have one of strong corroboration.

But we have nothing to substantiate the supposition that he was not attended by his wife and children. In the early part of this volume I ventured to doubt it; and I have since found that the writer in the *London and Westminster Review* thinks it probable his family lived with him in his house in Southwark, and his occasional visits to Stratford were for his purchases of land, and other matters; his love, for instance, of his parents, brothers, and sisters. There is nothing, to my observation, against this probability except that, in 1596, his only son, a boy about twelve years old, was buried at Stratford. For this, however, many causes may be assigned, and one in particular; the boy's ill health might have been, naturally enough, a reason for his being conveyed into the country, and placed under the charge of his grandfather. Combatting against groundless surmises, it is but common justice to state conjectures drawn from every-day occurrences in families.

In respect to the fact of no more children having been born after a certain date, "clearly proving" that a separation of man and wife must have taken place at that date, I have nothing to say. It is unworthy

of comment, though not of a smile at Mr. Moore's experienced reasoning.

Never for a moment did I entertain a suspicion of an "unfriendly feeling" towards his wife in Shakespeare's Will. As such a suspicion has latterly been too much promulgated, my fear is that any interpretation of so inartificial a nature as mine, so free from eloquent appeals, may not satisfy every one; though it has always appeared plain and without difficulty to myself. With this fear I proceed, carefully as I can, first stating the facts that have given rise to the suspicion.

His wife was in no way alluded to when the Will was first drawn out. All his lands and personal effects, with few exceptions, appear to have been bequeathed between his two married daughters. Afterwards, interlineations were made, leaving trifling sums to his friends, or, as he calls them, his "fellows," Heminge, Burbage, and Condell, "to buy them rings;" and this *Item* was also interlineated,—“I give unto my wife my second best bed with the furniture.”

Well! there was already a sufficient provision made for the wife, which may properly be presumed, and for which tolerable evidence can be adduced, quite strong enough for the occasion. Every bequest and every condition in the Will, we may imagine, were made with the wife's knowledge and consent. She, being provided for, could not but be pleased at the division of the bulk of his property between her daughters. Had the property been left out of the family, we might have imagined otherwise. But,

after reading over the Will, preparatory to signing, the testator thought, or it was suggested to him, that some mention of his wife ought to be made, with some memorial for her. When appealed to for her choice of a memorial, she fixed on a particular bed, which happened to be known in the house, and, consequently, must be so designated, as the "second best bed." Upon which the bequest, her own choice, was interlined. Such is my interpretation; which, of course, rests much on the probable evidence I can produce of a sufficient provision having been made for her.

In the first place, it was likely she possessed property in her own right, as the daughter of a substantial yeoman; but on that it is not necessary wholly to insist. In his Will every thing he possessed seems specified, with the exceptions of the copyright of his works, or his share of it, and his shares in the theatre. For whose benefit were they? We cannot believe that he had disposed of his interest in the theatre when he retired to Stratford, because we have proofs to the contrary in his having written plays there, and sent them to be performed at his own theatre; and, to the last, he calls his partners his "fellows," not his *former* fellows, which he must legally have done, had they ceased to be partners. Farther, the conjunction of memorials, in interlineations, to his three principal partners and to his wife, looks like a shareholding connexion in his mind between them, which was to commence immediately after his death. Is it not then probable that, by a special agreement, he, and afterwards his wife, provided she outlived him, had certain shares in the theatre? The copyright

also might have been prohibited, by agreement, from publication, as long as either he might choose to withhold his works from the press, or his wife might live, in order to make the performance of his dramas more profitable ; or until he chose, as an individual shareholder, if not as the author, to give his consent. Whether we suppose that the copyright was the property of all the shareholders, so that the publication required the consent of each individual, or that it was his own sole property during life, and afterwards his widow's for her life, we still find that her consent as shareholder, or by previous agreement, was necessary for its publication. For her own interest, as a life-receiver of the yearly profits, it is not unreasonable to suppose she would not consent to the printing of the manuscripts, knowing they remained secure. But what grounds have we for believing all this, besides those already stated? A fact, I answer, to which, for such a purpose, no allusion has been made,—the publication of all the plays immediately on the death of the widow in 1623 ! She was buried on 6th August, and the folio was entered at Stationers' Hall on 8th November following. Heminge and Condell were then no longer restrained, and they edited the works for their own profit. We read nothing in their *Dedication* or *Preface* ; we have heard nothing of any part of the profits being for the daughters.

Probable evidence cannot amount to conviction. But those inclined to doubt it, should consider there is not a shadow of proof, nor of reasonable conjecture, for the suspicion of an inimical feeling towards his wife in the last act of his life ;—a suspicion that

would overthrow at once his character for universal kindliness.

Two intriguing anecdotes are told, chiefly on account of the witticisms they contain, which I can neither believe nor refute. They are worthy of a jest book, for which they seem to have been intended.

Some have given their opinion that Shakespeare's works are, after reading others of his age, comparatively free from verbal impurities; and a few have called him worse in this respect than his contemporaries. Many years ago I profited by a distinction made by Coleridge, in one of his lectures on Shakespeare, showing the innocence of his free expressions compared with those of other poets. Coleridge then observed something to this effect;—"Whatever we meet with in Shakespeare which may offend the ears of modern society, we must acknowledge there is nothing to corrupt, nothing to intoxicate the passions. His language, however free, is never intoxicating." This is a grand distinction between him and others. Several of his fables might have admitted of descriptions and continued allusions of a nature like those which we find in his fellow dramatic poets; but he treated them remotely as he could, and his allusions are transient, if not necessary. He is not accountable to the prudery of modern manners, which is a questionable advance in civilization and morality.

The few who censure him as worse than others should consider this; not a vague opinion, but a fact in dramatic history. Only fifty years after his death, when the stage was restored after the reign of the Puritans, the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, one of

whom died before, and the other but nine years after him, were preferred by the town to his, chiefly, as we gather from Dryden, on account of the "gaiety" of the dialogue of those "twin stars of wit," and because no poet could equal them in describing the "wild debaucheries of gentlemen." Dryden's comedies, not to mince the term, are infamous. In those days Shakespeare's muse, as we know, was not a favourite; he was not licentious enough. Now the manners are so changed, that Beaumont and Fletcher, Dryden, and a crowd of others, would have their comedies hooted from the stage by the most profligate among us. With all their interest and dramatic effect, with whatever care, omissions, and changes have been made, they are still found too much grounded on obscenities and repulsive subjects, to become approved acting plays; while Shakespeare continues to step forth in his glory, with no omissions but trivial ones, such as were pure in his day, or such as many have suspected never came from his pen. Had he lived to edit his own works, doubtless the greater and the worse part of his objectionable passages would have been unknown, particularly in his comic scenes. Buffoon actors, like Tarlton, his fellow in the theatre, prided themselves in adding to the text, and were greatly applauded according to their extemporaneous witticisms. These crept into the text, and became a cause of complaint on the part of Shakespeare, as we read in Hamlet's advice to the players.

I know not what omissions Mr. Bowdler has thought fit to make; but there are certain omissions which ought to be made in every edition. When I have met

with language,—unlike the nakedness of a child, for to such nakedness I do not affect the smallest repugnance,—but with language partaking rather of the nakedness of a satyr, or offensive from its creating disgust, I generally perceived, at the time I first read with the aid of annotations, that such passages were not printed either in one of the old quartos, or in the first folio. Now when passages of that peculiar bad character are wanting in either one of the old copies, I hold it authority sufficient for an editor not to introduce them; nay, it is incumbent on him not to pollute the text by one authority alone. I will go farther, and say that a discriminating editor might satisfactorily fix on what is and what is not Shakespeare's, when he has no authority in one of the old copies, solely by attending to the distinction between the nakedness of a child and that of a satyr, and between that which is inoffensive in nature and that which creates disgust.* After all, such passages are far from being numerous,

* Let me not be misunderstood. I would not have his text deprived of the plain unvarnished name for vice; such a name befits it; if minced, it is a sort of pander. Our own honesty, as well as that of our language, is in jeopardy, by attending to the qualms of affectation, or the affected blush of hypocrisy. Adultery and such matters now stalk abroad under refined titles; which was not permitted by our ancestors, unless from the mouths of the *guilty*, privileged to use palliative or cant phrases. If it is an evidence of our civilization to veil the ugliness of vice in our discourse, why is not murder expressed by a milder word?—why not rendered less revolting to our ears? And what might be the consequence? If certain actions are criminal, is not the taking away their distinctive badge dangerous to society? Our verbal truckling with vice would have shocked the morality of the honest olden time.

and may be spared without the slightest injury to the text ;—another proof of their having been interpolated. Shakespeare himself has let us know, in his poems to Master William Herbert, how disreputable, in his estimation, is licentious conversation ; and he forcibly contends that a libertine's authority over his company, or his grace in uttering it, renders it the more dangerous :

“Lilies that fester, smell far worse than weeds.”

For his character on this subject, let the reproof to his young friend in the *Fourth Poem* be read ; and then we shall feel assured we possess unworthy additions to his works.

An accusation of a bad nature has lately been made against him by Dr. Lardner, which ought to be crushed in the bud, since it pretends to be founded on tradition ; a fragile authority certainly, but still apt to mislead many. It bears an air of candour, being linked with the highest praise in the same sentence ;—“On his honesty or his justice, no censure has been passed even by tradition ; but tradition does say that he was not averse to the bottle.” If this means that he was addicted to wine drinking, Dr. Lardner has met with a tradition that has totally escaped me. We know of his good companionship, and some particulars of it, but where is the traditionary authority for his not having been “averse to the bottle,” or for a hint to that effect ? Neither Dr. Lardner, nor any one else, I hope, is entitled to such authority. No one accustomed to be inflamed by wine, from Anacreon down to Ben Jonson and his Bacchanalian

successors, appears otherwise in his writings than sensual, blinking, or extravagant; three qualities not discernible in Shakspeare, unless aptly when he introduces drunkards. He will never be advisedly quoted as an example by toppers. They cannot meet with encouragement in Hamlet's atrocious uncle, the sack-sponge selfish Falstaff, the revolting Sir Toby Belch, the murderer and insensible Barnardine, or the brutish Caliban; Cassio's occasional drop too much meets with woful consequences, and is followed by an edifying remorse; and Lady Macbeth, with her cordial to invigorate her towards murder, is by no means a pattern for her sex to follow. Never was keener or more temperate satire, for anger on such an occasion is suspicious, against intemperance, than in the several characters above-mentioned, each influenced or wedded to evil by it, though in different degrees, as it acts on different characters. No apology is offered for the vice, except by an Iago, from interested and infamous motives, which crowns the satire of the whole. In his poems, (an extraordinary omission for an English poet) Shakspeare never once alludes to wine. But judging solely from the unruffled tendency of his philosophy throughout his writings, his brain never could have been inflamed; and it remains for Dr. Lardner to inform us from what source he has derived so impure a traditionary stream.

But Dr. Lardner has done infinitely worse. When I have pointed it out, I shall take leave of him for ever. It is almost impossible, almost absurd to imagine malignancy towards the memory of Shakspeare, yet to what else can we ascribe it? I do not now

speak of a matter of opinion, but of a falsification of our poet's text, in order to blacken his character. In the second volume of Dr. Lardner's *Lives of the most eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Great Britain*, in his life of Shakespeare, page 101st, line 9th from the top, word 6th, ME is placed instead of HER. This falsification cannot well be his printer's error; because, though not in direct terms, he makes the utmost use of it in an avowed attack on the morality of Shakespeare. Did he possibly copy the falsification from any edition?—if so, his prudence will prompt him instantly to point out precisely what edition had misled him. It is true, this volume may not have been written by Dr. Lardner; but no other name is attached to it, no other in a late advertisement by the booksellers. If he was not the author, he should give the name of the calumniator, so that he may be known and avoided. At present Dr. Lardner's is the only name implicated.*

* It would have given me pleasure to alter this paragraph, or to explain in a note that Dr. Lardner was blameless. For this purpose I forwarded a copy of it to him; at the same time expressing my regret at having been compelled to write it, and offering to do anything in my power. The following, dated 12th of April, is the only answer I have received. His name remains responsible. "SIR,—I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 7th inst., and in answer beg to inform you that I am not the author of any part of the volume containing the Life of Shakespeare; and that I am responsible merely for selecting fit persons to write the different articles. I have, however, sent a copy of your letter to the author of the article, and I will forward to you his answer when I shall receive it.—I am, Sir, your obedient Servant,

DION. LARDNER."

There is no fact more gratifying to the lovers of Shakespeare, than, putting aside the refuted story of deer-stealing, that nothing has come down to us, written or traditionary, to subvert our faith in his honesty, his modest bearing, his harmless mirth, and his brilliant wit in conversation, together with his character of "gentle," bestowed as his distinguishing mark. That epithet "gentle" had, in his day, a grander meaning than merely mild or meek; it signified nobility of mind, in the same way as its compound sense is or ought to be understood at present in the word *gentleman*. Milton's nephew calls him, with the same feeling, but less comprehensively, "unvulgar."

Greene urged nothing against him when he enviously called him "Shake-scene" and "upstart crow." Such appellations might have offended Shakespeare; but with us they signify no more than his success as a dramatist. Greene is supposed to have died in 1592, and Henry Chettle edited the *Groat's worth of Wit*, containing the offensive words. Chettle afterwards apologized in these words; to which it must be premised that the first, alluded to separately, was Marlowe, whose private character was not good, and "the other" was Shakespeare.

"About three months since died Mr. Robert Greene, leaving many papers in sundry booksellers' hands; among others his *Groat's worth of Wit*, in which a letter, written to divers play-makers, is offensively by one or two of them taken. And because on the dead they cannot be revenged, they wilfully forge in their conceits a living writer; and, after tossing it to and fro, no remedy but it must light upon me.

With neither of them that take offence was I acquainted, and with one of them I care not if I never be. *The other*, whom at that time I did not so much spare, as since I wish I had; for that as I have moderated the hate of living writers, and might have used my own discretion (especially in such a case, the author being dead,) that I did not, I am as sorry as if the original fault had been my fault; because myself have seen his demeanour, no less civil than he excellent in the qualities he professes. Besides, divers of worship have repeated his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art."

Thus a faint attack on him, at the commencement of his career, was the occasion of our being possessed of such evidence,—“his demeanour no less civil than he excellent in the qualities he professes!” Then his farther character, given by persons of repute, stood in these strong terms,—“uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty!” Every thing proves his right to the title “gentle.”

Frugality, and consequent accumulation of property, have been indeed mentioned in his disparagement by one, judging from his style, of that numerous class who desire to live by others; and the complaint against him is appropriately put in the mouth of one Ratsey, a noted highwayman. Shakespeare’s husbandry was good and wise; but we may be certain he was not deficient in generosity. We hear neither of his parsimony nor extravagance. Moderate in his own wants, and possibly deaf to the applications of spendthrifts, he was industrious, but not greedy,

because he was upright in his dealings. He had great claims on his filial as well as paternal affection, in the poverty-stricken state of his father with a large family, and in the support of his own children. Spendthrifts ought to have begged in vain from him. Without injury to others, he was careful first to provide for those he best loved, and to acquire and maintain his independence; afterwards he made a provision for his daughters in marriage. The elder became the wife of Dr. Hall, a physician; and the younger of one Quiney of Stratford, shortly before his death. We may gather from his Will there were just fears of Quiney's prosperity, or of his prudence in money affairs; while equal reliance seems to have been placed on Dr. Hall as on his daughter Susannah. Thence has arisen the notion that Susannah was his favourite.

His friends appear to have been hearty and steady, but, for the reason I have given, not eulogizing. It is almost to be regretted that he possessed the perfect virtue of not making enemies. Had he been attacked, during the zenith of his fame, a score of friends might then have rushed forward in his defence, bequeathing to us, in their warmth, many valuable facts, anecdotes, and allusions. As it is, we must be happy in a belief, which nothing contradicts, that he was beloved by his partners in the theatre, his fellow-poets, and every one with whom his interest or his society was concerned. Rowe affords us the following information in his *Life*, and Rowe lived near enough to his time to attain this sort of general knowledge, though too distant for particulars:—"What particular habitude

or friendships he contracted with private men, I have not been able to learn, more than that every one, who had a true taste of merit, and could distinguish men, had generally a just value and esteem for him. His exceeding candour and good-nature must certainly have inclined all the gentler part of the world to love him, as the power of his wit obliged the men of the most delicate knowledge and polite learning to admire him."

How much have we to grieve there was no Boswell among the poets and literary men who frequented the club, established by Sir Walter Raleigh, at the "Mermaid," in Friday-street! Fuller tells us, "Many were the wit-combates betwixt Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war: Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow in his performances. Shakespeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention." Mr. Leigh Hunt, after quoting this passage in the *Indicator*, adds,— "This is a happy simile, with the exception of what is insinuated about Jonson's greater solidity." But the two poets appeared to Fuller as they have appeared to many others, not good judges. Take an act from *Julius Cæsar* or *Coriolanus*, and place it by the side of an act from *Catiline* or *Sejanus*, and then the question of the greater solidity will be settled. The simile also is more appropriate than Fuller imagined; for should we ask a competent judge of

ship-building, if a Spanish great galleon was built with higher learning and greater solidity than an English man-of-war, the competent judge could not forbear to smile at our ignorance.

Speaking of these great men, Mr. Leigh Hunt truly observes,—“ Their intimacy, dashed a little, perhaps, with jealousy on the part of Jonson, but maintained to the last by dint of the nobler part of him and of Shakespeare’s irresistible fineness of nature, is a thing as notorious as their fame.” This should be always borne in mind. If they were rivals, they were not, with all Ben’s faults, unworthy of each other.

We have more news of the “wit-combates at the Mermaid,” but without any mention of individuals. It is in the poetical *Letter from Beaumont to Ben Jonson* :—

“ What things have we seen
Done at the Mermaid ! heard words that have been
So nimble, and so full of subtile flame,
As if that every one from whence they came
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
And had resolved to live a fool the rest
Of his dull life.”

There was wine, but we are not told every one was inspired by it. Beaumont, in this letter from the country to his friend, rather sickishly complains of “*your full Mermaid wine*.” Ben Jonson afterwards formed a club in a room called the Apollo, at the *Old Devil Tavern*, Temple Bar. For this club he wrote “*Leges Convivales*,” and penned a welcome over the door of the room to all those who approved of “the

true Phœbian liquor." Alas ! to a love of wine, soiling his better nature, we may trace his occasional overbearing and irascibility.

Before I close these observations on Shakespeare's moral character, it may be expected I should offer some opinion respecting his religious tenets. For this purpose I have a list, prepared long ago by myself and others, of quotations from his works, with doubtful hints of many kinds ; but I have changed the intention I once had of applying them, and, in fact, we can gather nothing satisfactory from him, as a dramatist, in confirmation of his creed. His father, we believe, was a Roman Catholic. It is a subject on which I would rather not pretend to decide ; nor, perhaps, is it praiseworthy in any one to inquire particularly into those opinions which he has not thought fit directly to avow. Whether he was Roman Catholic, Protestant, or Deist, as some contend, cannot be determined ; but, whatever his faith, his reverence for the Creator, putting aside certain expressions not considered profane till the reign of James the First, his goodwill towards man, his love for every created thing, his charity, his natural piety,—all these are as observable in his works as they are remarkable in the poems of Cowper, but entirely without gloom.

Still, if in his dramas it was essential to identify his feelings with those of others, have we nothing in his volume of *Poems* where he willingly expresses his own religious feelings ? Yes, one entire sonnet, and no more, proving his strong faith in the immortality of the soul, and possibly, as a friend has observed, imbued with arguments from Saint Paul. It stands

in his *Poems*, sonnet 146th; the same which I remarked, while speaking of the SIXTH POEM, *To his Mistress*, as certainly out of its place, and probably introduced, together with the foregoing octosyllabic stanza, precisely where the SIXTH POEM was originally divided into two parts.

TO HIS SOUL.

“Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
Fool'd by those rebel pow'rs that thee array,
Why dost thou pine within, and suffer dearth,
Painting the outward walls so costly gay?
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?
Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
And let that pine to aggravate thy store:
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
Within be fed, without be rich no more:
So shalt thou feed on death, that feeds on men,
And, Death once dead, there's no more dying then.”

In my *Introduction* I offered an opinion that much might be gleaned of Shakespeare's character from his works. The numerous passages I had marked with this intention have been well nigh appropriated in the general observations already made under various heads; while every one of his principal Dramatis Personæ, by a careful analysis, might be brought forward in evidence of his peculiar character as a philosopher, though never of his character as an individual.

Conscious of enthusiasm, and well aware how closely it is allied to error, I have written under the influence of self-repression. Carefully as I could, I have sifted the authorities and conjectures before me ; not cast to the winds an objection because I did not feel its weight ; and sometimes I have pointed to a circumstance, hitherto passed by, though against my own argument.

Our common complaint is that we know scarcely anything of our greatest poet ; but the truth is, we know much if we properly avail ourselves of all we have, and if we do not admit the prejudices of others to intervene ; if we bestow a reasonable reliance on the documents in our hands, and turn a suspicious, if not a deaf ear, to the baseless suppositions of those who cannot endure the thought that so mighty a genius should not own more than our common share of frailty, while they cannot prove, or justly suppose, he had one tenth part. “ On this hint I spake,” endeavouring to untwist the cords that have long bound down his name as a man.

Some happy accident, or patient researches like those of Mr. Collier, may bring to light more facts. For myself, recollecting how swiftly the discovery rushed through my mind, the explanation of his mis-called *Sonnets* must be ascribed to accident rather than research. Many may think me deficient in observations on these newly brought to light FIVE POEMS TO HIS FRIEND,—on their merits generally, their beautiful stanzas, and on the thousand subjects to which they give rise ; but in that direction I most

suspected my enthusiasm, and I feared lest it should be said I was striving to magnify a molehill into a mountain. This could hardly have been true ; yet I did not like the anticipation of such a reproof, groundless or not. With the key given, I leave others to explore and more fully expatiate at their will.

HIS DRAMAS.

No more Prefaces should be offered to Shakespeare until we have culled the best parts from those we already possess, adding the many admirable views of his genius and writings which have been presented, from time to time, incidental or otherwise, by a diversity of authors. One of my cherished hopes is, that such a collection may be skilfully united into one *Preface*, free from error or prejudice of any sort, taking from each writer that only in which he has shown himself a master. A *Preface* from one mind cannot suffice for the myriad-minded Shakespeare, as Coleridge called him. For a becoming and due admiration of him, strange as it may sound in our ears, the crowd still stands in need of a combined and strong authority. He is our greatest boast, but somehow he is not fashionable; too many drawbacks are alleged or insinuated. In England his excellence is not so acknowledged, the reverence paid to his memory is not so absorbing, as in Germany. We are not yet cleansed from the thick scurf which overran our proper national taste in poetry during the

last century ; much has been done, but not enough. Germany has remained tolerably free from foreign or scholastic canons of criticism ;—the bane of every country, if a distinction exists in its language and character from others. Our public could, and can, sit and applaud patchwork degrading representations, profanely called Shakespeare's plays, when, had they a genuine understanding for his works, they would resent an addition, though of half a line, with hisses and tumult. To Mr. Macready we are indebted for a return to the text of several plays. He is the first manager of a theatre, for these hundred and fifty years, from the days of Dryden, Tate, and Cibber, with their factitious notions of the stage, who has comprehended the apparently easy doctrine, that alterations, unless confined to judicious curtailments, must be for the worse, if applied to a dramatist, whom none has approached as an artist any nearer than as a poet. Mr. Macready's success, according to the newspapers, and to what I hear at the distance where I reside, has been in proportion to his superior knowledge and courage ; this fills me with good hopes.

About twenty years since, in the midst of our qualified admiration, Morgann's *Essay* having been unheeded, we beheld a translation of a German criticism on our own boasted but unjustly used poet. While it was eagerly read, a sense of national humiliation pressed forcibly upon us. Schlegel has given us the noblest, and altogether the best work on his genius. Compile as diligently as we can to form a *Preface*, still extracts from Schlegel and Morgann would stand above others.

Schlegel's eloquence has cast suspicion on his criticism. So grand a strain of unremitting praise must be, we were then willing to think—resenting a foreigner's reproachful interference with our remissness and neglect of Morgann—excessive and enthusiastic. Yet, on examination, at least in the present day, I hope, we should still farther resent any abatement, any attempt to lessen it on a single separate point. Hazlitt himself, who studied the feeling of the public, so as not violently to offend, wrote his volume in partial restraint. Knowing his unqualified praise of Shakespeare in conversation, I once ventured to express surprise at some parts of his volume, when the answer he gave me amounted to this: "The public would not bear it; they would not read a book of unalloyed praise. Unpopular books may sometimes be the best; but it is not my business to write them." Accordingly he met Schlegel no more than half way in his assertion of the dramatist's art being consummate, and the effect of deep study; and he felt satisfied with bestowing transcendent admiration on the popular characters, allowing others to sink into comparative obscurity. Perhaps he was in the right; the public was to be humoured by degrees to their benefit.

For the same reason that I desire a *Preface* of collections, I would gladly possess the characters of the plays from a variety of authors classed together, so as to form an assembly of critical observations on each play, and, if possible, on every one of the dramatic personæ, by different critics, taking from them those passages wherein they have excelled. Thus,

Mrs. Montague's *Essay*, and Morgann's *Essay on Falstaff*, (the two best of the last century, still frequently studied) and Richardson, who, though too much of a professor, would be found useful, might be made to contribute their best. Then we should enjoy some choice passages from Lamb, and other late writers, together with Mrs. Jameson's delightful and well-defined illustrations of the female characters, and the brilliant works of Schlegel and Hazlitt. The worst that can be said of all these, is, that attention is generally confined to the principal acting characters, leaving almost unnoticed the less popular, but not less admirable ones, for disquisition, far as their truth in individuality and profound metaphysical distinctions consist. Aware of this want, many years ago I endeavoured to draw attention to what are termed the inferior plays, and I should be proud to continue in that humbler office as an assistant.

In the observations I am about to offer, I shall rather take for granted that the above-mentioned works are well known to my reader, than presume, without consent, to avail myself of what is not my property. Something, little or much, in the way of remark, if not of criticism, I shall write on most of the plays, more, according to my plan, in the spirit of doing that which others have left undone, than in controverting or adding to their opinions. Yet I shall not forbear, when I feel myself entirely opposed, to state a reason for my objection. Should any reader chance to recognize an old acquaintance, drawn from some bygone periodical publication, I claim it as my own. Anxious to offer something on certain neglected

plays and characters, I could not do better than retain, nearly in the same form, my former writing ; another, but not myself, may do better.

From his dramas we attain our only knowledge of his character as a metaphysician. By studying his dramatic creations in detail, as recommended by Morgann, we arrive at his philosophy of the human mind, independently of his excellence either as a dramatist or as a poet. Whatever notice I may bestow on stage-alterations, committed in ignorance, or without reflection, is for the purpose of displaying his character, and shielding it from misrepresentation before the public.

The plays will be considered in a sort of chronological order of my own, without a wish of inflicting my opinion on others. We may all judge for ourselves on subjects where no judgment can be pronounced definite. I shall not attach a positive date to any, unless on tolerably established authority, ascribing its first appearance to within a year of it. Mr. Collier's discoveries render it necessary to invent a new chronology.

Beyond all that has hitherto been observed on the morality of Shakespeare's works, this passage from Hazlitt is most to the purpose. It is in his criticism on *Measure for Measure* : " Shakespeare was, in one sense, the least moral of all writers ; for morality (commonly so called) is made up of antipathies ; and his talent consisted in sympathy with human nature, in all its shapes, degrees, depressions, and elevations. The object of the pedantic moralist is to find out the bad in everything : his was to show that there is some

“soul of goodness in things evil !” In one sense, Shakespeare was no moralist at all ; in another, he was the greatest of all moralists. He was a moralist in the same sense in which Nature is one. He taught what he had learnt from her. He showed the greatest knowledge of humanity, with the greatest fellow-feeling for it.”

I. TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.—Mr. Skottowe informs us, “The plot of the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is taken from the story of Felismena, in the second book of the *Diana*, a Spanish pastoral romance, by George of Montemayor, translated into English by one Thomas Wilson.” It should rather be said, many incidents comprised in the plot ; for Mr. Skottowe allows that the entire character of Valentine, the principal one, is superadded in the play.

Every one agrees in placing this as the earliest, or among the earliest, of his plays ; but it is impossible to fix on the year in which it was written. My belief is, as I have stated, that the chronologists have fixed the commencement of his career as a dramatist at too late a date. I not only rank this as his first known dramatic production, but I imagine it might have been written at Stratford, probably played there ; and was his chief recommendation to the Blackfriars company—with whom, I conjecture, he left his native town for London. We are certain he was a shareholder, with four names below him on the list, in 1589, about four years after his arrival in London. To attain this post in so short a space of time, he

must either have been a wonderful actor, which is contrary to all accounts, or he was a successful playwright. So rapid a rise can only be conceived as a consequence of his profits from writing. At Stratford he had tried his hand at Seneca, a useful occupation, inasmuch as teaching him what style to avoid; and he was ever and anon, year after year, a spectator of plays in the town, if not also picking up knowledge of the profession among the players there. Can it be thought, that, with his mind, aided by these advantages, Shakespeare was incapable of producing this comedy at the age of one-and-twenty? Sheridan was little older when he wrote his best comedies.

This play appears to me enriched with all the freshness of youth; with strong indications of his future matured poetical power and dramatic effect. It is the day-spring of genius, full of promise, beauty, and quietude, before the sun has arisen to its splendour. I can likewise discern in it his peculiar gradual developement of character, his minute touches, each tending to complete a portrait: and if these are not executed by the master-hand as shown in his later plays, they are by the same apprentice-hand,—each touch of strength sufficient to harmonize with the whole. We dwell with pleasure on Valentine, the two ladies, and the two servants, especially Launce; whose whimsical drollery is acknowledged by every one to be the most irresistible of all his clowns; but Proteus has been declared unworthy of the poet,—a compound of contradictions; a being, either infamous or honourable, either criminal or penitent, according to the exigences of the scene. Proteus has been neglected

and misunderstood; and, regarding his conduct as natural and admirably delineated, I crave permission, at some length, to introduce him, as a creation of Shakespeare, to more favourable notice.

There appear to be three principal objections against the consistency and propriety of his character: one is inconstancy and guilt, without apparent cause, in a man praised and beloved by the other persons of the drama; the second is the improbability of his sudden repentance, and of his return to Julia's arms, with all his former love, uninjured by the treachery of broken faith; and the last is, the immoral conclusion that may be drawn from his remaining not only unpunished, but rewarded, and that at the sacrifice of a lovely and interesting girl. These seeming incongruities vanish when we attend to the impression made on us by the character, and carefully examine the text.

From his being the associate of Valentine, and the favourite of Julia, we are apt to conceive a higher opinion of his qualities than he can justly claim. When we bring him nearer to our view, and scrutinize his character by the assistance of Shakespeare's pen, developing the secrets of the heart, we shall find him a youth who, on the first temptation, was likely to become false and treacherous. He is deficient in kindly affections; he is a stranger to every warm and generous sensation; he is wrapped up in self, keenly alive to the effects of public disgrace, but little affected by the consciousness of dishonour; a proficient in learning, but wanting natural ability. His reputation has been obtained, among the old, by his studies, and by his

being free from the excesses of a wild and thoughtless disposition ; and these properties, together with a handsome person, and the accomplishments of a gentleman, gain applause among the young. His presumptive goodness is founded on his not having committed evil ; he is not addicted to the follies of his age ; he is neither quarrelsome nor vindictive ; he offends nobody. A due consideration of all that is right and becoming, attends him in all situations ; if a fellow-creature was in danger, he might possibly not refuse to fight in his defence ; if his friend or father were to fall down in a fit at his feet, he would reflect awhile which physician lived nearest, which was the most likely to be at home, and which was the most skilful for that particular kind of disease ; instead of running with all speed to the first one that entered his head, like a man with more heart than brains at the moment.

After this description of him, it may be asked, how could Valentine bind to his bosom, in the closest ties of friendship, one so bereaved of every amiable qualification ? Shakespeare tells us, and the information is enough, that

“ From their infancy

They had conversed, and spent their hours together.”

It was an early attachment,—therefore strong ; not connected by a congeniality of disposition, but by habit, and a continuance of mutual kindness. Had they not been schoolfellows, and their friendship matured before their judgment, it is scarcely possible they would have been common acquaintances. These two friends form one of Shakespeare’s happy contrasts. There is a life, a gaiety about Valentine, in every

thing he says and does, and his raillery is as elegant as it is inoffensive. He never opens his lips but he speaks the language of his soul, and wins at once our admiration and esteem. By the strength of his natural talents he has overleapt mere scholarship; and, unconscious of superiority, bestows unmerited applause on Proteus, who knows no more than what is told him by his tutor. In short, Valentine is a man from whom a woman derives a higher dignity, and is ennobled among her sex, the instant he declares his passion.

Perhaps it is difficult entirely to excuse Julia for having made choice of Proteus. He was handsome, and had not betrayed a single fault; which are much to an unsuspicious girl. Julia, though exquisitely portrayed, is inferior to most of Shakespeare's women; she has beauty, constancy, and tenderness, but no other brilliant attributes. Compare her with Viola, in a similar situation with herself, and she will appear to great disadvantage. To define the love in the breast of Proteus, I should say it was not in the slightest degree mental, but corporeal; it neither had its source from the intellect, nor was it fed from it; but it proceeded from mere changeable nature. Like an idolater in religion, he must have his deity continually before him, or his adoration ceases. It was not possible for him, like Valentine, to fall into ecstasy at the sight of his mistress's glove; it would have been valueless to him, unless it contained her hand.

The comedy opens with the separation of the two friends, when Proteus displays no ardour of attachment,—although his conduct is wholly blameless. He expresses, in the approved style, a desire to accom-

pany him to the sea-side ; but this being answered with " Sweet Proteus, no," he readily forgoes the pleasure of being the last person to bid him farewell, and does not conceive it needful to repeat his request. He had done everything that the established forms of friendship demanded, and doubtless to his own satisfaction as a friend : he had entreated Valentine to remain in Verona, and afterwards wished him all happiness in his travels, and even offered to be his bead's-man, an offer much in character with so sober and sedate a youth.

" In thy danger,
If ever danger do environ thee,
Convey thy grievance to my holy prayer,
And I will be thy bead's-man, Valentine."

The wording how excellent ! how unconsciously cold ! When left alone, not a word falls from him expressive of regret. Instantly he talks of self, of his passion for Julia, and laments her cruelty in a strain ridiculous in any but a young pedant.

" Thou, Julia, thou hast metamorphosed me,
Made me neglect my studies, lose my time."

At length Julia promises to be his ! Never having dwelt with enthusiasm on the perfections of his mistress, feeling no more than a partiality and the warmth of youth, it ought not to be expected that the news should madden him into rapture ; it is quite enough that he is highly pleased.

" Sweet love ! sweet lines ! sweet life !
Here is her hand, the agent of her heart ;
Here is her oath for love, her honour's pawn :
Oh ! that our fathers would applaud our loves,

To seal our happiness with their consents !
Oh, heavenly Julia !”

After being commanded to follow Valentine to Milan, he briefly laments his banishment, or rather reasons on the means that once lay in his power to prevent it, and concludes with a moral reflection on the instability of happiness.

“ Oh, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day ;
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away !”

Beautiful as the lines are, which is another matter, let us compare his words with the heart-rending tenderness of Valentine, when he is forced to quit his Silvia.

“ Except I be by Silvia in the night,
There is no music in the nightingale ;
Unless I look on Silvia in the day,
There is no day for me to look upon ;
She is my essence ; and I leave to be,
If I be not, by her fair influence,
Foster'd, illumined, cherish'd, kept alive !”

Proteus bids adieu to Julia, coolly advises patience, declares he will return as soon as possible, and promises constancy in a set speech.

One of the maxims of Rochefoucault is, “ absence diminishes the weak passions, and augments the strong, as the wind blows out a candle, and increases a fire.” This is proved by Proteus, who no sooner arrives at Milan than “ his candle is blown out,” and

“ The remembrance of his former love
Is by a newer object quite forgotten.”

In his passion for Silvia he is conscious of his "false transgression," and seems startled at the self-knowledge he has just obtained. How naturally he confesses the immediate effects of his perfidy !

"Methinks, my zeal to Valentine is cold ;
And that I love him not, as I was wont."

He strives to summon up the powers of his mind, and hopes to "check his erring love;" but, in the same sentence, perplexed in irresolution, and fearfully looking forward to the doubtful contest, determines, should he chance to fail in his endeavours, to employ his abilities in the attainment of his desire. For a while we behold him wavering and confused ; on the utmost boundary of innocence, but shuddering to make the fatal step beyond it. Hitherto the absence of temptation had withheld him from the commission of an unworthy action, and the first deviation from virtue alarms him. His conscience is wounded to the quick, and he can do nothing till the pain has ceased. He stands in need of a "flattering unction," seeks for it in the sophistries of his perverted brain, and at last, by their assistance, becomes a mean disgraceful villain, boasting that he has brought over reason to his side. His arguments are selfishly ingenious. Like Hudibras, he discovers not only a palliative, but an excuse for his perjury.

"To leave my Julia shall I be forsworn ;
To love fair Silvia shall I be forsworn :
To wrong my friend, I shall be much forsworn.

* * * * *

Unheedful vows may heedfully be broken ;
And he wants wit, that wants resolved will
' To learn his wit to exchange the bad for better."

Then, for his own interest, what he says is incontrovertible:—

“ Julia I lose, and Valentine I lose :
If I keep them, I needs must lose myself ;
If I lose them, this find I by my loss,
For Valentine, myself ; for Julia, Silvia :
I to myself am dearer than a friend.”

Having proceeded thus far, the inevitable conclusion is,—

“ I cannot now prove constant to myself,
Without some treachery used to Valentine.”

From this moment his crimes increase in number and magnitude. No sooner has he placed his foot on the empire of guilt, than, according to the ancient custom of the country, he receives a passport to travel into any part of it without interruption. We need not follow his steps.

At length, wearied out by his fruitless villainies, and exasperated at Sylvia's reproaches, he attempts to violate her person ; and it is here, at the very height of his depravity, and at the overthrow of all his schemes, that he becomes a penitent. All this is consonant to nature, and particularly so with Proteus. Had he been stopped in the midst of his career, his sudden conversion would be less probable ; a man is more sincere in his detestation of crime, when, after having tried it in every possible way, he is convinced of its inefficacy. The disgrace endured by Proteus was so overwhelming, so insupportable, that he was ready to adopt any means to deliver himself from the dreadful punishment ; and as nothing but absolute contrition

could be of service, he flew to it with more ardour than he ever displayed in any action of his life. If I may venture to give an opinion on the sincerity of his repentance, I would say it was so far honest, that, from that time forward, he neither thought of obtaining possession of Sylvia, nor endeavoured to revenge himself for the shame he had suffered; and very possibly he was so far a good husband to Julia, that she never could complain of a repetition of his former injuries. In fact I look upon him, at the end, as on a child, who had committed a heinous fault, and was effectually reformed by timely chastisement.

Let those blame Shakespeare for the immoral tendency of this comedy, who have not charity, like Valentine, to forgive; and who imagine that a few lines of solemn admonishment, just as the curtain drops, are of service to mankind. Shakespeare's morality is less in his fables, than in his characters; where the good are incitements to virtue, and the erring are dissuaves from vice. There are very few among us who are not compelled tacitly to acknowledge their similarity to Proteus, and to blush at the resemblance,—who are not aware of their having, at times, and in a degree, clothed their justification in the same wretched subtleties, when prompted by self-interest or passion. Proteus is our brother.

The disputed difficulty towards the end of the play I would solve by abolishing it, as an interpolation by some one capable only of counting a line on his ten fingers, in order to give Julia's fainting another direct cause, but at the expense of Valentine's character, who is compelled preposterously to say,

“ And, that my love may appear plain and free,*
All that was mine in Silvia, I give thee.”

Julia faints at the sight of Proteus, overcome by remorse and shame; then, as she recovers, seeing that moment the most propitious for the discovery of herself, she has recourse to the artifice of the two rings.

Against the opinion of others, mine is that this play does not conclude too abruptly.

II. HENRY THE SIXTH. *First Part*.—The author of the original of this historical drama is unknown, and nothing of it, except in its present amended form, has come down to us. So scattered are the amendments, that some have thought that Shakespeare had no hand in it at all. His hand is to me apparent, in many places, throughout; but rather timidly employed, as if he feared to exercise decision, and was not yet aware of his superiority on all occasions. Certainly the account Talbot gives of his entertainment as a prisoner, breathes of Shakespeare uncontrolled; but the passage, for length and undoubtful continuity, may stand alone. Even the scene of the dying Mortimer, and that in the castle of the countess, are seemingly mixed. In most of the other scenes it is not always easy to trace him. Altogether he was not perhaps author of more than one-fourth of the whole.

My conjecture is that it was his first attempt at altering another's work, and imagine, since all agree

* Reminding us of Dr. Johnson's example of an careless versifier:

“ Lay your knife and your fork across your plate.”—*See Boswell*.

that for awhile he was chiefly occupied in adapting inferior plays for representation, that he commenced with this soon after his arrival.

III. PERICLES.

“It hath been sung at festivals,
On ember-eves and holy ales;
And lords and ladies of their lives
Have read it for restoratives.”—*Prologue.*

Transferred from the halls of lords and ladies to the theatre, it was a favourite with the people; but, owing to the improvement of dramatic poetry and art, it at length required higher claims than it possessed to support its popularity. To entirely remodel this wild and strangely improbable romance might have benumbed its attraction; for it is rare to find that the multitude is pleased with direct changes in a traditional tale. Shakespeare therefore employed himself in restoring the romance to its former importance on the stage, by numerous retouchings in the dialogue, and by writing whole scenes of great dramatic power.

Unless we suppose it had been ineffectually retouched previously to his adaptation, we cannot well account for the appearance of three distinct styles: one bald and utterly unpoetical, though bearing an antique air, urging on the commencement with a dogged will; the second only passable, and too frequent throughout the four first acts; and the third, truly worthy of Shakespeare. It may be that the lines which I term only passable had been all partially changed by him. Yet, wanting the effect of his shadow merely passing over them, I must conjecture

that some one had been before him in the task, and that he had retained many of the former alterations entire. However that may have been, the question now is as to his unmixed property.

In the first place, we have to overcome that great drawback, a want of varied colour in the characters, the essential stamp of his genius. Far from having colour, they are unshaded outlines, filled up with black and white, to represent the bad or the good, and thus shoved on and off the stage. Nothing can be discovered of his profound knowledge of human nature, or of his philosophy, nothing beyond the work of a poet and an artist, and they appear but faintly in the two first acts. The language of Pericles himself rises from poverty gradually into strength and dignity, until it attains its utmost height; as if Shakespeare had learned, during his task, to throw more and more aside of the original; to feel, as he proceeded, a high confidence in his own powers; and at last to have discovered there was a soul in the romance, in spite of its deformities, which inspired him to attempt his hitherto untried excellence, to spread his wings, and to set, as it were, an example to himself for the future.

The fishermen in the second act glance at us, in their comic dialogue, with the very trick of his eye; but we meet with no scene of his invention, or complete reconstruction, till we enter Cerimon's house at Ephesus in the third act. Every line there is his undoubted property. Trivial as the sketch may be called of this good physician, it is a portrait; we see him, and we know him, though observed only under one phase. Here, in the recovery of the queen

from her trance, we have a most natural description of the physician's skill being suddenly called into action, his swift orders mingled with his reasoning on cases, his haste to apply the remedies, the broken sentences, his reproof to a loitering servant, the keeping the gentlemen back to "give her air;" the whole, as if by magic, making the reader an absolute spectator of the scene.

"*Cerimon.* This chanced to-night.

2nd Gentleman. Most likely, sir.

Cerimon. Nay, certainly to-night;
For look, how fresh she looks! They were too rough,
That threw her in the sea. Make fire within:
Fetch hither all the boxes in my closet.
Death may usurp on nature many hours,
And yet the fire of life kindle again
The overpressed spirits. I have heard
Of an Egyptian, had nine hours lien dead,
By good appliance was recovered.

(Enter a Servant with boxes, napkins, and fire.)

Well said, well said; the fire and the cloths.—
The rough and woful music that we have,
Cause it to sound, 'beseech you.
The vial once more.—How thou stirrest, thou block!—
The music there.—I pray you, give her air.—
Gentlemen,
This queen will live: nature awakes; a warmth
Breathes out of her; she hath not been entranced
Above five hours. See!—how she 'gins to blow
Into life's flower again!"

A single epithet in the next scene marks the passage for his own:

"We'll bring your grace even to the edge o' the shore;
Then give you up to the *mask'd* Neptune, and
The gentlest winds of heaven."

From the moment Marina appears, Shakespeare himself takes her by the hand, and leads her gently onward; but I cannot perceive he had any connexion with the vile crew who surround her.

Compared to all that precedes it, or to any thing else, the first scene of the fifth act is wonderfully grand, beautiful, and refined in art. Every one ought to know it; but it is too long for me to quote. The recall from a state of stupefaction caused by grief, and the prolonged yet natural recognition of Marina, interwoven with a thousand delicate hues of poetry, lead us on in admiration till we think nothing can be added to the effect. Still the crown of all is to come, in the poetical conclusion, true to nature while it rests on our imagination. Pericles, instantly after his sudden rush of joy, his overwrought excitement, fancies he listens to the "music of the spheres!"—he wonders that others do not hear these "rarest sounds;"—then he sinks on his couch to rest, and still insisting that there is "most heavenly music," falls into a sleep, while Marina, like an angel, watches at his side!

IV. V. HENRY THE SIXTH. *Second and Third Parts.*—Malone has carefully compared these with the two original plays, whence they were taken, and the result is as follows, in respect to the number of lines to be wholly or in part assignable to Shakespeare:—1899 are entirely his own.—2373 are partly his own, having been formed by him from original lines.—1771 are retained, without alteration, from the originals.

From this statement we perceive that the plays are more than two-thirds rewritten by him, and that the remaining third is his adoption. Though the construction and characteristic features remain generally the same, the difference is most striking, owing to the energy and art displayed by Shakespeare in their adaptation.

Considering the multiplicity of stirring events, and the length of time supposed to elapse during each play, it is surprising that so many characters are well defined, and actually made prominent.

So vivid an epitome of the wars between the red and white roses affords an instructive contrast to the proverbial saying—"The good old times." Here swords are despicable unless continually dropping blood, and warrior's heads are tumbled on the scene as if for sport, while the uproar of drums and trumpets is drowned in clamorous scolding. We naturally look for the cause of all this; when the fury is found to have arisen from Henry's mildness; the inhumanity from his abhorrence of it. Severe satire on the "good old times!"

We are called an ungallant nation; yet, amidst these murderous excesses, when even the boy Rutland could not escape, the women passed on unscathed; so entirely so, that Margaret, the "Amazonian trull," cannot persuade any of the butchers, in her despair, to kill her. The same may be said of our Commonwealth wars,—the women were unharmed; which is some satisfaction to an Englishman, when he fails in picking up a lady's fan gracefully.

VI. ROMEO AND JULIET.—This tragedy was taken from Brooke's poem of *Romeus and Juliet*, and from a translation of Bandello's tale, in Paynter's *Palace of Pleasure*; not from the poem alone, which has been remarked by others, and farther explained by Mr. Skottowe. After its first appearance, it received many amendments from the author's hand.

No deviation from the originals is extraordinary, except that which represents Juliet "not yet fourteen." It cannot be understood. I have indeed a guess at the cause, which will seem ridiculous, but it is possible;—the extreme youth was, at the time, an apology to the audience for the boy who played so arduous a part. An alteration in the text may here be admissible, but in no other word, however it may be curtailed for the better in representation.

Nothing on the stage has offended me more, where our poet has been concerned, than the daring innovation at the deaths of the two lovers. Garrick, I believe, was the contriver; and he has been praised for the unworthy task. Mr. Skottowe, not confining himself to *inquiries into the originality of Shakespeare's dramatic plots and characters*, where he has proved himself an adept, ventures to say,—“The concluding circumstances of the Italian novel are infinitely more affecting, and better calculated for dramatic effect, than those of Shakespeare, who was misled in this important particular by the English versions of the story.” Now, with all due respect for the opinion of Mr. Skottowe, and of others, I beg leave to affirm that our poet was, as usual, in the right.

He had the Italian and the English version of the concluding scene before him, and he chose to follow the latter, which makes Romeo die before the waking of Juliet. To do otherwise would, I contend, have been against his own good feeling, and most likely against that of his audience. It is true, our ancestors were accustomed to scenes of physical horror on the stage, and mental horror also, when the consequence of evil; but I question if their good feeling would have endured the sight of two young guiltless creatures suffering the most excruciating mental torments. No, though death was dealt out with an unsparing hand in their tragedies, agony of mind, during a human being's last moments, was reserved to Othello in his remorse, or to the atrocious Cardinal Beaufort on his death-bed. Even Lear, in his bitter pang before he dies, justly suffers for the injury he had committed towards Cordelia. An actor and actress may rejoice in the opportunity given to them of struggling, screaming, and groaning, and in the frantic, though ill-written speeches assigned to them; but their rejoicing ought not to be our pain. Had Shakespeare chosen to write such a scene, the effect, from its truth to nature, would have been too intense to be witnessed. As it is, the *rodomontade* is offensive in two ways: one as being an ignorant caricature; the other, as intruding on our better thoughts the possibility of so unalloyed and so unmerited a horror.

If any particular moral is to be drawn, it must be from the punishment of the two rancorous fathers, with their only son and daughter dead at their feet. Shakespeare has throughout described Romeo and

Juliet as objects of envy, rather than of compassion. (The charm of their love extends to our own breasts. In spite of the conscious drawbacks that may exist within us, we listen to them, hoping that we may feel, or wishing that we had felt, so pure a passion. As with most of Shakespeare's characters, we are the creatures he represents,—we are Romeo or Juliet while we read. Though quickly followed by misfortune and death, we partake of their transport, think it purchased cheaply, and would undergo ten times as much to be enabled to love and be beloved with so much purity. Their joy, short as it is in counted time, surpasses that of the most lengthened lives of common mortals.)

Happiness in this excess cannot endure; it must be extinguished, or, I should say, made immortal by death; not sullied, or possibly destroyed, by indifference, or worldly experience. Our imaginations are insulted at the supposition of a Romeo and Juliet being married, and living happy ever after,—at least in this world. But in the necessity for their death, as Shakespeare had sublimated their nature, he shrunk from the Italian authority for putting them to the torture; he would not for a moment bereave them of their happiness, but he made them die for each other gladly. Misfortune to them was nothing in comparison with their true passion; whatever they had suffered, it was a suffering for each other, therefore a delight. They kill themselves with scarcely less joy than when they met in the friar's cell to be joined together. Romeo calmly drinks the poison with, "Here's to my love!" welcomes the touch of death,

and "Thus with a kiss I die!" Juliet, awakening, finds him dead, kisses his lips, and calls the dagger "happy," with which she kills herself to follow him. (Poison and the dagger are nothing; the end is peace.)

VII. LOVE'S LABOUR LOST. — Whether this comedy was ever popular, or merely admired by the few, may be doubted; but it was formed to be acceptable to the gentry of the time; and it was played before the Queen, with additions to its first appearance. This fact may account for the unequal division of the acts. It is a comedy of conversation, and exhibits every mode of speech, from ignorance, pedantry, and affected euphony, up to elegant discourse, and the grandest eloquence.

Hazlitt did not study all Shakespeare's works, or he did not discern all his qualities. He says: "Still we have some objections to the style, which we think savours more of the pedantic spirit of Shakespeare's time, than of his own genius; more of controversial divinity, and the logic of Peter Lombard, than of the inspiration of the muse. It transports us quite as much to the manners of the court, and the quirks of courts of law, as to the scenes of nature, or the fairy-land of his own imagination. Shakespeare has set himself to imitate the tone of polite conversation then prevailing among the fair, the witty, and the learned; and he has imitated it but too faithfully. It is as if the hand of Titian had been employed to give grace to the curls of a full-bottomed periwig, or Raphael had attempted to give expression to the tapestry figures in the House of Lords. Shakespeare has put

an excellent description of this fashionable jargon into the mouth of the critical Holofernes, 'as too picked, too spruce, too affected—too odd, as it were, too peregrinate, as I may call it; and nothing can be more marked than the difference when he breaks loose from the trammels he had imposed on himself, 'as light as bird from brake,' and speaks in his own person."

Now this seems to have been written without a suspicion that our poet's purpose, in his imitations, was satire. As such it must have been understood in his day, and keenly so; and it is our business to understand it in the same way, or confine ourselves to those passages of elegant language and eloquence, which he has brought forward as contrasts to the rest.

So completely is this a comedy of conversation, that majesty itself is a companionable gentleman; and we mix among the groups of lords and ladies, or with Costard and Holofernes, finding ourselves equally at home. We are carried back to the days of Elizabeth, when knights thought more of poetry than a tournament—when they had not long fallen in love with the alphabet; and, in compliment to their modern Dulcinea, were careful not to speak without proving that they had "fed of the dainties that are bred in a book."

Objections are made to the poverty of the fable, and to the want of invention in its management. But the author would have defeated his own purpose, had he admitted an intricacy of plot, or placed his characters in situations to call forth the stronger

passions. Satirical as it is, the entire feeling is good-humour. A reader who can enter into the spirit of it, will find sufficient interest to keep his attention on the alert. As to the charge of a want of dramatic invention, where the four lovers follow each other to the same spot, where three of them read their love-sonnets, and hide themselves, by turns, among the trees, possibly that may be considered of little weight. Three of the lovers are so artificial, that each must needs pen a sonnet to his lady, not only because it was out of his power to speak to her, but it was the fashion to pen sonnets; and each must sigh her name in a grove, because such had been, time out of mind, the lover's humour. At any rate, the amusing discovery at the last, and Biron's eloquent poetry, make ample amends.

If Shakespeare had not assured us this young Ferdinand was King of Navarre, I could not have believed it; he is so unlike a king. He never pleads his sacred anointment, nor threatens with his royal displeasure, nor receives flattery from great men of his own making; nor can he despise Costard the clown. His wit allows him to sport a jest, his good-temper to take one from others; and at all times he is superior to playing the monarch over his associates. Longaville, "well fitted in the arts, glorious in arms," and the "well-accomplished youth," Dumain, are as much kings of the conversation as himself. A weariness of courtly pleasure, the fashion, the idleness of their days, give these youths a butterfly-notion of being book-worms. Scholars they will be, and learned ones, and that at the end of three years; so they are

to study hard, and “not to see a woman in that term ;” with many other strict observances touching fasting and watching,—easy to record in a schedule. Their oaths are taken ; and Biron, from pure good-fellowship, joins this holy alliance. Biron, whose ascendant mind cannot but convince their common-sense, has no controul over their folly. He argues, he rallies ; but all in vain. Rousseau was not the first “to reason against reading ;” Biron was before him, and he speaks some things which hard spellers in a closet should con over betimes.

The “admired princess,” “a maid of grace and complete majesty,” and her three lovely companions, soon bring the gentlemen to their senses.

Then, for broad comic, what a list of unconscious drolls ! First we have a “refined traveller of Spain,” a “tough signor,” a “child of fancy,” hight Armado,

“One, whom the music of his own vain tongue
Doth ravish, like enchanting harmony ;”

and he “is in love, yea, he loveth ;” and asks favour of the “sweet welkin to sigh in his face.” Holofernes stalks about with the ghost of a head ; vanity was his Judith. This portentous schoolmaster was a particular satire on Florio, who gave the world a folio of hard words, miscalled a dictionary ; he provoked Shakespeare by some ugly daubing, and, in return, he is here painted at full length. He “smells false Latin,” and can “humour the ignorant” in bad verses ; “this is a gift,” quoth he, “that I have, simple, simple ; a foolish, extravagant spirit,” &c.—and he is “thankful or it !” Moreover, he will play three of the worthies

himself, "thrice worthy gentleman;" and "will not be put out of countenance." Sir Nathaniel, "the hedge-priest," is his toad-eater, and piously says, "Sir, I praise the Lord for you, and so may my parishioners;" takes out his table-book, to note "a most singular and choice epithet; calls deer-shooting by great folks "very reverend sport, truly; and done in the testimony of a good conscience;" and gets a dinner gratis, "for society (saith the text) is the happiness of life." I beg pardon of the courtly old Boyet, for placing him in such company, for "he is Cupid's grandfather, and learns news of him;" one "that kissed away his hand in courtesy," and

" Picks up wit, as pigeons peas ;
And utters it again when God doth please."

Costard, in his rustic ignorance, looks on him as "a swain, a most simple clown!" And Costard is cunning: he "had rather pray a month with mutton and porridge, than fast a week with bran and water;" and has the wit to hope he shall fast on a full stomach. All these gentry, down to Costard, speak, or ape to speak, in

" Taffata phrases, silken terms precise,
Three-piled hyperboles, spruce affectation,
Figures pedantical."

"They have been at a great feast of languages, and stolen the scraps," as the little boy Moth tells us; that "handful of wit," who "purchases his experience by his penny of observation;" not too young to relish a joke, and join with the best effect in their full-blown talk, though old enough to laugh at it; a character

the poet has introduced to prove the absurdity of men's priding themselves in their deformities of language. Oh ! I have forgotten the constable Dull ! " A man of good repute, carriage, bearing, and estimation."

" Via, goodman Dull ! thou hast spoken no word all this while.

Dull. Nor understood none neither, sir."

On his other characters, those of well educated society, Shakespeare bestows his own easy-flowing, expressive language, steeped in the imagination, not begrimed in affectation. Thus was the satire directed towards the ladies and gentlemen of his time ; holding forth to them a choice, either to be ranked among the silly pedants, and laughed at by children like Moth, or among their superiors.

The principal character is Biron, whose properties, by turns, are eloquence and mocking gibes ; the latter are keenly reprobated, and, in promise, corrected by Rosaline. When free from that fault, which, on the stage among fictitious persons, is harmlessly delightful, but, away from it, meets with none but " shallow laughing hearers," and is at the painful expense of the party ridiculed, he is beyond common praise ; nor is there throughout Shakespeare a strain of eloquence equal to Biron's, near the end of the fourth act, beginning with,

" Have at you then, affection's men at arms !"

VIII. HAMLET. 1589.—My reason for assigning the above date, is founded solely on the passage from Nashe, already given. It is to be understood as re-

garding its original state, before the alterations and enlargements had taken place.

Mr. Skottowe tells us,—but on what authority I am ignorant,—“the history of Hamlet also formed the subject of a play which was acted previous to 1589.” He then conjectures that Shakespeare was assisted by that elder play now lost.

If there exists a description of that elder play, I do not hesitate in saying it is Shakespeare's, and no other's, provided the ghost appears in it. According to the old black-letter quarto, whence the tragedy is derived, the killing of the prince's father was public; consequently no ghost was employed to reveal it to the son. Now the change from an open slaying, with some show of cause to a secret murder, involving the necessity of the ghost's appearance to seek revenge, is so important, so wonderful an invention for the dramatic effect of the story, that I cannot imagine it belonged to any but Shakespeare.

Should I be mistaken in this opinion, still I appeal to Nashe's authority, published in 1589, that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* had been then played: the word in italics, *Hamlets*, proving that *Hamlet* was then on the stage, and that it had been written by a “Noverint,” or lawyer's clerk: while the examples which I have given of Shakespeare's law-phrases, and which might be multiplied tenfold at least if sought in all his works, prove that such must have been the employment of his early days.

Nothing in the character of Hamlet has given rise to more animadversion or critical disquisition than his apparent unfeeling behaviour to Ophelia; and actors

have, without distinction, represented him as guilty of unprovoked rudeness, or influenced by a touch of real madness, in this scene. This I have frequently talked of as a mistake ; and I once urged my reasons to an actor in London, when about to play it, but in vain. We are obliged to Mr. Skottowe for a valuable elucidation of the text on this subject. He points out that, in the original story, the usurping uncle, in order to discover if Hamlet's madness is feigned or real, causes him, attended by spies, to be met by a young lady, who had been already tutored to discover what was passing in his mind. Hamlet has long entertained a sincere affection for her, and was ready to fall into the snare, were he not timely advised of it by a friend ; upon which he is careful to behave towards her as if distracted in his mind. Here, Mr. Skottowe justly observes, recurring to the scene between Hamlet and Ophelia, " A satisfactory solution of the difficulty is derived from the history ; whence it is learnt, what is not to be learnt from the play, that Hamlet was aware that Ophelia was purposely thrown in his way ; that spies were about them ; and that it was necessary, for the preservation of his life, to assume a conduct which he thought could be attributed to madness only." Those accustomed to examine the prototypes of Shakespeare's fables, may be satisfied with this solution, for they well know how artfully he could appropriate incidents or shades in character, while he partially or almost wholly differed from the story. But I cannot agree in the assertion, that such a solution is " not to be learnt from the play," because it has always been evident to me there. As it is now in

my power, with Mr. Skottowe's assistance, to remove a difficulty which has hitherto been beyond my skill, I will recall to the reader's mind the precise circumstances related in the text, and thence draw, what seems to me, the only conclusion that can be made.

In order to discover the real cause of Hamlet's seeming madness, Ophelia is placed in his way, while her father and the king conceal themselves within ear-shot as "lawful espials." Hamlet enters without observing her, absorbed in deep reflexion, and gives breath to the famed soliloquy of "To be, or not to be." At length, seeing her, he gently approaches, and salutes her in a tone suitable to her occupation, and to his serious state of mind :

" Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remembered !"

Unaccustomed to deceit, she doubtless acts according to her father's instructions, and rather suddenly offers back his remembrances of love. He, having just before been made aware that his two school-fellows, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, were employed as spies upon him, is naturally full of suspicion, looks furtively around if any one is near, and perceives the king and Polonius spying from their covert, and eagerly listening. The moment he has caught a glance at them, he exclaims to himself "Ha ! ha !" and half doubting the conduct of Ophelia, asks this searching question,—"*Are you honest ?*" She is surprised ; and in self-defence he instantly assumes his former mask of madness, though, as usual with him, "there is method in it." As the dialogue proceeds,

a thought crosses his mind respecting her participation in their treachery, and he puts another question to her, completely suited to his purpose,—“Where’s your father?” In compelled untruth, poor girl! for she well knows he is listening close at hand, she faintly (I suppose) replies,—“At home, my lord.” His exclamation at this is intended, if not to reproach her, to be loud in his ears;—“Let the doors be shut upon him; that he may play the fool no where but in’s own house. Farewell.” Scarcely has he left her, probably in anger at her duplicity, when he returns for the purpose of adding to the deception of the king, and talks in a higher strain of madness than before.

Thus it has ever appeared to me that our poet gives sufficient hints of his intention in this scene.

IX. ALL’S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.—“I cannot reconcile my heart to Bertram;” says Dr. Johnson, “a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helen as a coward, and leaves her as a profligate; when she is dead by his unkindness, sneaks home to a second marriage, is accused by a woman whom he has wronged, defends himself by falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness.”

If we cannot “reconcile our hearts to Bertram,” the play is altogether intolerable. If at any time his conduct is such as to provoke our contempt, or if we did not perceive among his errors, the germs of a good and honourable mind, the interest of the story would be at an end. The hopes and fears of the other characters, their efforts to reclaim him, and the happiness of Helen, would be all despair the moment he became unworthy of our sympathy.

Shakespeare appears to have adopted this tale from Boccaccio, who lays no stress on the argument, for the purpose of portraying those moral evils, frequently interwoven with the privileges of the nobility,—prejudice, arrogance, and wilfulness; and to point out how they may be corrected in the discipline of the world. A nobleman of the court of Queen Elizabeth, differed widely from one of our present House of Lords; and, in this instance, the scene being laid in France, we may suppose him invested with the rights of a feudal-lord to their fullest extent. Bertram is, by nature, generous and affectionate. His vices are factitious as the heraldic records of his ancestry, and, like his inheritance, belong to him by legitimate descent. His father, I suspect, was not a jot better in his youth. Among his many virtues there is one mentioned, which lets us a little into his patrician character, and it comes most appropriately from the mouth of majesty :

“ Who were below him,
He used as creatures of another place;
And bow'd his eminent top to their low ranks,
Making them proud of his humility.”

Praise from a king sounds bravely within the walls of a palace, but loses elsewhere. It is not enough that we should be told the old count was excellent as a soldier and a courtier, in order to make us esteem him. We understand his value better when his widow prays that her son “ may succeed his father in manners as in shape,” and willingly join in her love of his memory; for the word of such a lady is worth a thousand kings; and, in all probability, it was her strength of mind, aided by his own experience, that made him a man to be lamented.

The young count comes before us possessed of a good heart, and of no mean capacity, but with a haughtiness of rank, which threatens to dull the edge of the kinder passions, and to cloud the intellect. This is the inevitable consequence of an illustrious education. The glare of his birthright has dazzled his young faculties. Perhaps the first words he could distinguish were from an important nurse, giving elaborate directions about his lordship's pap. As soon as he could walk, a crowd of submissive vassals doffed their caps, and hailed his first appearance on his legs. His spelling-book had the arms of the family emblazoned on the cover. He had been accustomed to hear himself called the great, the mighty son of Roussillon, ever since he was a helpless child. A succession of complacent tutors would by no means destroy the illusion, and it is from their hands that Shakespeare receives him, while yet in his minority.

It is too much to say that Bertram "marries Helen as a coward." He is ward to the king who commands the marriage—

"Which both thy duty owes, and our power claims ;"
and he backs his authority with threats of—

"both my revenge and hate,
Loosing upon thee in the name of justice,
Without all terms of pity. Speak, thine answer !"

His Majesty may be a moody old gentleman, but not the less fearful on that account. The most bigoted bachelor would prefer a wife to irretrievable ruin. If ever there was little shame in yielding to compulsion, here is a case in point. Helvetius

indeed tells us that "he who fears nothing will do nothing contrary to his inclination ; it is in quality of cowards that troops are brave." But this is a refinement upon a word beyond its general acceptation. It suits the mouth of a metaphysician, but a man of the world would hardly understand it, and a great moralist has nothing to do with it. We rather admire the boldness of young Bertram's sneering and ironical speech, wherein he consents to "take her hand," which could not be uttered without hazard while the brow of royalty was scowling upon him. Nor does he "leave her as a profligate." A profligate would have taken her to his arms before he abandoned her ; but he flies from her with indignation immediately after the marriage-ceremony. As I profess to entertain a brotherly affection for Helen, I am bound to inquire if there is any apology for such ungallant behaviour on the part of the bridegroom ; and in this my duty I must, as is usual, previously insist on the fault being all on his side. Well, even in this one-eyed view of the question, I must needs acquit him on the score of mere accident,—the coronet having slipped over his forehead and blinded his eyes to Helen's perfections. He knew not she was "a maid too virtuous for the contempt of empire ;" and it was utterly out of his comprehension "that twenty such rude boys (as himself) might tend upon, and call her hourly, mistress." All his knowledge was comprised in her being "a poor physician's daughter, who had her breeding at his father's charge ;" and his farewell to her at the castle shows he regarded her somewhat in the light of a menial, when he concludes his speech

with "Be comfortable to my mother, *your mistress*, and make much of her." To regard the poor girl with so little consideration is certainly very wrong; but at the same time it is very lordly, and Bertram is a lord. Besides, is the compulsion nothing? Suppose, reader (if thou art a parlour gentleman) that an act of parliament were to pass, compelling thee to take Dolly from the kitchen as thy wife. Truly, whatever deserving qualities Dolly might possess, or however good her education might be, I fear thou wouldest not perceive them, partly owing to her inferior station, and partly to thine own indignation at so tyrannical a law.

The Count likewise had a bad adviser at his elbow, one Monsieur Parolles. Nor does the fostering of so adroit a parasite cast any reproach on the understanding of an inexperienced youth. Parolles is not a bully like Captain Bobadil, or ancient Pistol, whose swaggering could only deceive a Master Matthew or a Dame Quickly. He talks like a soldier of "very valiant approval," and wears not his sword clumsily, but with a grace; such a counterfeit may pass for one of the current coin of Mars. He goes through the ordeal of the French Court without suspicion, save from one man. "He was first smoked by the old Lord Lafeu;" and he, with all his cunning, did not immediately discover him to be "a snipt taffata fellow," whose "soul was in his clothes." Should this play be acted, let it be borne in mind that Parolles, so far from being a buffoon, is serious, stately, and pompous. He has nothing of the droll or the fop. It is not for the love of distinction that he assumes the character of a man

of courage, but for the sake of a livelihood; and therefore there is no touch of vanity in his composition. He acts his part well, as a labourer works well when he knows he shall be well paid. It is remarkable that Helen is the only one at the castle who saw through his disguise; she says:

“And yet I know him a notorious liar,
Think him a great way fool, solely a coward;
Yet these fixt evils *sit to fit in him*, &c.”

This delineation does credit to Helen's discernment, and may be brought forward as an evidence of the truth of the Vicar of Wakefield's observation, that “the two sexes seem placed as spies on each other, and are furnished with different abilities, adapted for mutual inspection.”

An overweening pride of birth was Bertram's great foible. To cure him of this, Shakespeare sends him to the wars, that he may earn fame for himself, and thus exchange a shadow for a reality. There “the great dignity that his valour acquired for him” places him on an equality with any of his ancestors, and he is no longer beholden to them alone for the world's observance. Thus, in his own person, he discovers there is something better than mere hereditary honour; and his heart is prepared to acknowledge that the entire devotion of Helen's love is of more worth than the court-bred stately smiles of a princess. He will not again turn a deaf ear, nor give a peevish reply, to those arguments which had been made use of in behalf of the “poor physician's daughter;” and which, by the by, might be sculptured (without offence, I hope) over the door of the Herald's College:

“ Strange is it that our bloods,
Of colour, weight, and heat, pour'd all together,
Would quite confound distinction, yet stand off
In differences so mighty.—

—— That is honour's scorn,
Which challenges itself as honour's born,
And is not like the sire. Honours best thrive
When rather from ourselves we them derive
Than our foregoers : the mere word's a slave,
Debauch'd on every tomb ; on every grave
A lying trophy ; and as oft is dumb,
Where dust, and damn'd oblivion is the tomb
Of honour'd bones indeed.”

I know not how to palliate the conduct of our young soldier in his love for that pretty Florentine lass, Diana. He was yet in his minority, to be sure ; and that Parolles, “ a very tainted fellow, and full of wickedness,” did his utmost to further the affair ; yet still I find it difficult to excuse him. After my utmost moral consideration, I feel it impossible to do any thing better than yield him up to the judgment of the pure and spotless ; and they perhaps may be merciful, though those, the most conversant in his crime, should, as by usage established, plead in aggravation. But, let it be observed, while Shakespeare chronicles this fault, he allows it to be canvassed and severely censured by others ; not by greybeards, who may have forgotten their similar delinquencies, or grown envious of what they but faintly remember, but by the gay, the youthful gallants of the camp ; who, while they exclaim against it in bitter reproof, mingle his shame with a fearful consciousness of their own frailty. What extreme justice and what charity here meet together !

The learned Doctor goes on to tell us that Bertram "sneaks home to a second marriage;" which is as contrary to the text as that he travelled in a balloon. The war being ended he returns to France, and agrees to marry the Lord Lafeu's daughter, rather as an expiation than by choice. He will do any thing prescribed for him, otherwise his case is hopeless. At the last Diana enters, accusing him of a breach of promise of marriage, with as much archness as modesty can possibly assume, backed by a string of riddling impossibilities, very amusing to the reader, but wondrously perplexing to the parties concerned. Throughout this trying scene Bertram never "defends himself by falsehood." He neither confesses nor denies the promise. If we look back to the interview between him and Diana, where she laughs at his promise, and begs his diamond ring, we cannot be surprised at the low estimation in which he holds her virtue. There is a plot against him, and the part Diana takes in it necessarily involves her in his worst thoughts. He is guilty of no "falsehood," except as touching a certain ring on his finger; and, challenged as he is, before the king and the whole court, how could he reveal its history? In all intrigues, whether amatory or political, it is held infamous for the parties not to be true to each other, at the expense of truth towards the rest of the world. Why then should Bertram be seriously blamed? It was rather his care for Diana's good name, than his own, that induced him to forge that foolish tale of the ring being thrown to him from a casement. But he is at last "dismissed to happiness;" and why not?—his faults

are as venial as any Doctor's in Christendom ; perhaps more so, for he makes no pretence to morality. We find him acutely sensible of all his follies ; and he weeps for Helen, who is "supposed dead ;" why then, in the name of the most straight-laced virtue, should he not be happy ?

This play is seldom noticed, and perhaps little understood, unless there are many like Mrs. Jameson, who has ably analysed the character of Helen. It is called one of the poet's minor plays ; and as far as it has no communion with the sublimer passions, the appellation is correct ; in other respects it may rank with the best. That Dr. Johnson should have passed sentence on *Bertram*, according to his scholastic and abstract notions of perfection, instead of charitably considering the positive imperfections of our nature, is, at least, short-sighted. How he could have read the following beautiful passage in favour of our frail fellow-beings, and yet remained inexorable, I cannot imagine ; unless, as previously hinted by me, his doctrine and his practical morality took two opposite roads. It is spoken by one of the young lords, while they are canvassing the conduct of *Bertram* : "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together : our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipt them not ; and our crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our virtues."

X. WINTER'S TALE.—In this play Shakespeare has followed the liberties taken by his elder dramatists, much in the same degree as they are seen in *Pericles*.

No reference ought to be made to the *Winter's Tale*, as his sanction of unchartered rules for the drama ; since, in its excess, it is an exception to his general rule. The very title, *a Tale*, shows that he meant it rather as an amusing romance than as a regular play. Besides, in these undefined regions, and among these strange incidents, he might have found himself more at his ease in the covert compliment he was paying to the Queen. Walpole was the first to point this out ; and certainly the exculpation of Anne Bullen was intended in the innocence of the wronged Hermione. He observes, " The most striking passage, and which had nothing to do in the tragedy, but as it pictured Elizabeth, is, where Paulina, describing the new-born princess, and her likeness to her father, says, "*She has the very trick of his frown.*"

But, allowing that Perdita was intended for Queen Elizabeth, I am surprised that Walpole did not perceive there was another, perhaps the chief, cause for the compliment being particularly agreeable to her—that of her proved legitimacy ; a circumstance most questionable in her case, since she was born before the death of Queen Catherine, who was not, to all men's minds, regularly divorced, and which had been openly disputed. If the audience at that day understood the allusion, the compliment would have been as grateful as it was delicately contrived. Of course her legitimacy was a subject to be hinted at enigmatically, and entirely away from the real objection ; yet Perdita's legitimacy, from the moment of her birth, becomes the conquering theme of the tale.

XI. A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.—How must Spenser have been enchanted with this poetry ! But can we believe that the multitude were enchanted ? or, if they were, could the poetry compensate, in their eyes, for its inapplicability for the stage ? Before the invention of scenery, an audience must indeed have carried to the theatre more imagination than is requisite at the present day ; yet, still I cannot but think that these ideal beings, in representation, claimed too much of so rare a quality, and that it failed at the first, as when it was last attempted in London. Hazlitt has dwelt on the unmanageable nature of this “dream” for the stage ; and was it not equally unmanageable at all times ?

There is no document to assist me, nothing of argument to back my opinion ; yet I cannot forbear supposing that the failure of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Blackfriars' Theatre, was the cause of Shakespeare having said he would write no more comedies. Then Spenser's regret, deep as his love of Shakespeare's genius, might have induced him to commemorate the event in his *Tears of the Muses*, where Thalia thus speaks :

“ And he, the man whom Nature self had made
 To mock herself, and truth to imitate,
 With kindly counter, under mimic shade,
 Our pleasant Willy, ah ! is dead of late ;
 With whom all joy and jolly merriment
 Is also deaded, and in dolour drent.

“ In stead thereof, scoffin scurrility,
 And scorning folly with contempt is crept,
 Rolling in rimes of shameless ribaudry,
 Without regard, or due decorum kept ;

Each idle wit at will presumes to make,
And doth the learned's task upon him take.

“But that same gentle spirit, from whose pen
Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow,
Scorning the boldness of such base-born men,
Which dare their follies forth so rashly throw,
Doth rather choose to sit in idle cell,
Than so himself to mockery to sell.”

Spenser died about thirteen years after Shakespeare's arrival in London. It has been contended that these verses did not point to Shakespeare, but to some other “pleasant Willy.” I know of no other at that time, who, in any man's estimation, far less in Spenser's, could have merited a tithe of such praise. Our former chronologists, not having had the advantage of Mr. Collier's discoveries, might indeed have observed a difficulty in the application. Never having seen the subject discussed, I am ignorant if there is a better argument than one which I once heard gravely adduced, viz. as Spenser died before Shakespeare, it was impossible he could lament Shakespeare's death! —thus mistaking his being *dead* to *Thalia*, by choosing “to sit in idle cell,” for his being actually dead.

Regarding it as certain that Shakespeare was, at one period, unsuccessful as a dramatic poet, we have the more reason to love his nature, which never led him, throughout his works, especially in the *Poems to his Friend*, where he speaks much of himself, into querulousness at the bad taste of the town, and angry invectives against actors and audiences, so common to the disappointed playwrights of his time.

XII. RICHARD THE SECOND.

XIII. RICHARD THE THIRD.—Since the appearance of *Historic Doubts*, by Horace Walpole, it has been the fashion to talk of the dramatic injustice committed against the character of Richard the Third, and to lament that Shakespeare should have heaped infamy on an English king, who was by no means worse than his immediate predecessor and successor. These critics forget that public opinion is a higher kind of history, in relation to kings, than that derived from documents, containing palliatives of their conduct as individuals. Our best historians acknowledge Richard's murder of his nephews, which was beyond a private crime; it extended its outrage to the feelings of the whole nation; and this one crime is forcibly shown by Mr. Sharon Turner as the sole cause of Richard's utter disgrace with his subjects, involving his loss of crown and life. Under this revolting breach of trust as a Protector, this cold-blooded cruelty on boys, this infamy on his back, (whether crooked or not,) he became deservedly detested, and his private virtues, if he had any, were as deservedly forgotten. Mr. Sharon Turner conjectures that the pathetic ballad of *The Children in the Wood* was written during his reign; if so, the writer of it probably dethroned him. Another cause for his reign and memory being hated arose from his having, by that atrocity, renewed the civil wars in England. Certainly the policy of the house of Tudor directed history to blacken his character; but the attempt would have been vain, had not the nation been willing

to listen to accusations of every kind against him. After the suffering from the long contests between the Red and White Roses, the English were grateful to the Tudors for peace. The private vices or crimes of Henry the Seventh or Henry the Eighth scarcely reached farther than the nobility or the powerful, and the people generally seemed to acquiesce in oppression or violence towards them. The only unpopular sovereign of the family was Mary, because she offended the nation in a variety of ways; yet, possibly, she had more sincerity than the rest; but the people care nothing for the private virtues of a tyrant, however they may regard with a jealous eye the moral conduct of a monarch whose power is limited. This last assertion seems a paradox; but it might be easily explained.

As far as Shakespeare is concerned, Richard was already drawn for him in the second and third parts of *Henry the Sixth*, as well as in the *Chronicles* of Holinshed; besides which, both as a dramatist and a public historian, he was bound to follow the general feeling of his countrymen, who, not in the fury of change, but after a hundred years, still pronounced their detestation of the murderer of his nephews, and the renewer of their civil wars. No doubt the poet saw, in the histories of his day, ample authorities for exhibiting on the stage a highly effective tyrant, and therefore he dramatized the authorities as they were. Something might be urged against him, had he exaggerated the picture by inventing new crimes.

Never having witnessed *Richard the Third* on the stage, I cannot say if it is really affective there. I am

told that Mr. Macready played in it a few times some years ago, and that the whole performance as a tragic history, was electrifying ; but so many in the audience had been accustomed to see Cibber's *Richard the Third*, that it did not meet with general success. The many were disappointed at not having the reckless tyrant's soliloquies on conscience, his puling moans over the thoughts of what posterity might say of him, and fifty other anomalies. According to Mrs. Inchbald's *British Theatre*, Cibber's gallimaufry contains no more than three hundred and thirty-one entire lines belonging to Shakespeare's *Richard the Third* ; that is, not quite enough to form one act out of the five, the rest being eked out with broken lines, and lines from other plays by Shakespeare, or with diseased inoculations by Cibber. Yet in this patchwork state, instead of being hooted from the stage, it has been extremely popular for a century. May we not say that, a real love, a wise love for our grand poet, is yet but partially felt in England ?

XIV. JOHN.

XV. COMEDY OF ERRORS.—Perhaps Shakespeare, no longer able to restrain his comic humour, gave vent to it in this farce, in a sort of joyous desperation. Regarding it merely as a farce, from the moment the *Errors* commence, nothing has equalled it. Until I saw it on the stage, (not mangled into 'an opera,) I had not imagined the extent of the mistakes, the drollery of them, their unabated continuance, till, at the end of the fourth act, they reached their climax with

the assistance of Dr. Pinch, when the audience in their laughter rolled about like waves. It was the triumph of farce, of Shakespeare's art in all that belongs to dramatic action.

Here, it might be thought, that puns could be properly and plentifully introduced, where the twin brothers set the example of being personal puns on one another; yet there are few puns to be found. Truth is, the mistakes alone are ludicrous, and the action is serious. To the strange contrast of grave astonishment among the actors with their laughable situations in the eyes of the spectators, who are let into the secret, is to be ascribed the irresistible effect. The two Dromios, (Shakespeare's addition among other matters to Plautus) form a requisite link between the audience and the *dramatis personæ*; they invite us to mirth, otherwise we might half subdue it out of sheer principle.

The dresses in the representation were of no country, and bad for the purpose. Had they been more plain, and such as every Grecian, in a certain station, was likely to wear, one part of the improbability would have been overcome. But to see two pair of brothers elaborately tricked out in the same peculiar taste, with twin spangles and twin buttons, was increasing the improbability.

XVI. XVII. HENRY IV. *First and Second Parts*.—The deeply wrought Falstaff employs us at drawing conclusions with him, as soon as he is out of our company. He has puzzled those most whom he has most delighted, and may boast of having made

our rigid moralist, Dr. Johnson, regret, while he condemned the reformed Bertram, that Falstaff's career should end in disgrace. Hazlitt joins in this regret; and of both him and the moralist, we may say with Richardson,—“ But if they will allow themselves to examine the character in all its parts, they will perhaps agree with me, that such feeling is delusive, and arises from partial views. They will not take it amiss, if I say they are deluded in the same manner with Prince Henry. They are amused, and conceive an improper attachment to the means of their pleasure and amusement.” Richardson, though, professor-like, somewhat heavy with aphorisms, has afforded us good materials for thinking and arguing on this delightful compound of various and harmonized qualities; but we are chiefly indebted to Morgann's “*Essay on the dramatic character of Sir John Falstaff*.” We have no single disquisition so good and complete as this; and as many may not possess it, who regard Falstaff's disgrace as unmerited, I will transcribe a passage near the end. “ But whatever we may be told concerning the intention of Shakspeare to extend this character farther, there is a manifest preparation near the end of the second part of *Henry the Fourth* for his disgrace: the disguise is taken off, and he begins openly to pander to the excesses of the Prince, entitling himself to the character afterwards given him, of being *the tutor and the feeder of his riots*. ‘*I will fetch off,*’ says he, ‘*these justices. I will devise matter enough out of this Shallow to keep the Prince in continual laughter the wearing out of six fashions. If the young dace be a bait for the old pike,*’ speaking with

reference to his own designs upon Shallow, '*I see no reason in the law of nature but I may snap at him.*'—This is showing himself abominably dissolute: the laborious arts of fraud, which he practises on Shallow to induce the loan of a thousand pounds, create *disgust*; and the more, as we are sensible this money was never likely to be *paid back*, as we are told that *was*, of which the travellers had been robbed. It is true, we feel no pain for Shallow, he being a very bad character, as would fully appear, if he were unfolded; but Falstaff's deliberation in fraud is not, on that account, more excusable. The event of the old king's death draws him out almost into detestation: '*Master Robert Shallow, choose what office thou wilt in the land,—'tis thine. I am Fortune's steward; let us take any man's horses. The laws of England are at my commandment. Happy are they who have been my friends; and woe to my Lord Chief Justice.*' After this, we ought not to complain if we see poetic justice duly executed upon him, and that he is finally given up to shame and dishonour."

XVIII. THE MERCHANT OF VENICE. 1598.—As this play was entered at Stationers' Hall so late as 22nd July, I see no reason for ascribing it to the preceding year; and Meres mentions it, the last of the comedies, in November 1598. No chronologer of the plays has taken the account given by Meres, without due allowance, chiefly for omissions; yet he is our only guide. It has proved more difficult than I expected to class the plays up to this date in order, on account of the three entries made in 1597; but entries

were not, as we know, always made immediately after the performance of a play; sometimes years elapsed before an entry was made. Thus I allot to the first fourteen years, after Shakespeare's arrival in London, eighteen plays, including his adaptations. This some may think incredible, as too extraordinary a fertility; yet Malone, Drake, and Chalmers, ascribe about the same number to a space of only eight years, beginning in 1591. We may never arrive at any thing near exactness; and my attempt to mark the order of the plays is, for the most part, formed on my own view of the internal evidence belonging to each. Should I offer to explain this evidence, the task would be tedious, and, after all, it could not but be considered otherwise than as merely my self-persuasion, open on all sides to objections. Accordingly I leave my opinion without a plea in its favour, unwilling to expatiate on anything, unless it appears to me supported by a fact.

More forbearance is required than I had imagined in passing by, without a word, whole plays and numerous characters; and this forbearance will be increased as I proceed. But conscious that the observations and analyses of my predecessors ought to render me nearly always mute on the same topics, I shall continue to be silent where I do not differ from them. When their omissions give me an opportunity to speak, I may lawfully be indulged. On this play, I beg leave to make several remarks.

Toleration is an intolerable word, never used by our poet, unless, possibly, in a disapproving manner, under cover of Dogberry's ignorance,—“most tole-

rable, and not to be endured." To call it therefore, in kindlier words—respect for another's sincere opinions—has hitherto made but slow progress in the world; though, bereaved of *The Merchant of Venice*, it might have been slower. No argument in its favour could be more complete, or put in a stronger light, than that which we find here. Shylock, a usurer, a suspicious father, and altogether a bad man, compels us to grant him a portion of our involuntary good-will, solely on account of his being persecuted for constancy in his creed; and, thwarted in his hopes of a hateful revenge, we look at his ominous scales, balance his injuries against his rancour, and cannot forbear granting him our pity when he is defeated. How careful the author has been to maintain our fellow-feeling, and to make Shylock's religion meet persecution at every step! Not only Antonio is his reviler—he runs the gauntlet of abuse through Venice; his daughter forsakes and robs him because of his religion; wherever he turns, his misfortunes are a subject of exultation; and his fall is hailed with insulting open triumph. His claim to be enrolled among his fellow beings, in that powerful language, "Hath not a Jew eyes?" &c. has nothing urged against it, nor could a word be said in denial, yet his claim is allowed by none; and he is never treated with a show of respect until he is feared. We acknowledge his right, and are glad to see him at last, by any resource, treated with respect; we only recoil at his appalling vengeance. On the other hand, Antonio is a man justly honoured for every virtue, with one exception,—a want of charity, a good feel-

ing, a decent behaviour towards a fellow-creature, purely because he is an unbeliever. The religious animosity of Shylock was no more than retaliation. Antonio, indeed, may have had reason to accuse Shylock of extortion; but his calling him "misbeliever," and "dog," spitting on him, and spurning him, force us instantly to side with the usurer against the christian of unblemished fame. When reminded of these injuries, the virtuous merchant is ready to repeat them, so unconscious is he of acting with injustice. Representing the persecutor, on all other points truly estimable, and the persecuted in no degree estimable, yet entirely unanswerable in his defence, puts personal merit out of the question, and places the argument on the broadest principle, including the worst as well as the best among believers and infidels. Shakespeare strove to alleviate the bitter persecutions, not only towards the Jews, but towards all others. Catholics and Protestants, though the burnings in Smithfield existed no more in his day, were fearfully hateful to each other; when good men were contaminated by evil, and worse men by revenge, rendering the persecutor blind to his want of charity, and giving all the truth of reasoning to the persecuted, however unreasonable might be the creed to the more powerful party. For the benefit of those who could apply, or might hereafter apply Antonio and Shylock to themselves, Shakespeare portrayed them. Should any one think the application was unthought of, and accidental, let him contend that wheat grows into nourishment by chance; or try what philosophic works he can write by chance.

That there was an older play, by twenty years, on the same subject, hardly admits of supposition. The punishment of an avaricious Jew had previously afforded delight to the town, witness Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*; and it may be that other despised Jews had been brought on the stage, though not the Jew of Venice.

Instead of the exceptionable and extra-romantic commencement to the tale in the *Pecorone*, Shakespeare selected the story of the caskets. There was great skill in annexing an equal improbability to the Jew's bond. Both are difficult of belief; but the one tempts us to give credit to the other. The poet thus places us in the realm of strange events, and our pleasurable wonder is unalloyed by a sight of common life. Had an every-day occurrence been exhibited side by side with the Jew's bond, the latter might have appeared verging on the impossible.

Portia is a greater favourite with me than with Hazlitt; but I do not think her quite so amiable as she is described by Mrs. Jameson. Laying down the law, in which Portia seems to rejoice, cannot be perfectly amiable, though it were in a male counsel; for then we could feel no more than admiration at his professional talents. It is true, circumstances forced her into that situation; and, feudal lady as she was, she executes her task thoroughly. All she does is consistent; yet I much question if she does not experience a triumphant delight while she detains the court in suspense. Shakespeare has done much in softening the objection; but, somehow, it could not be entirely overcome.

It is my fate in this play, but in no other, to differ from Mrs. Jameson in her *female characters*. I cannot see that Jessica is intellectual or kind-hearted. Her eulogy on Portia, appropriately dashed with her new-fledged piety, is elegantly cold, like a dedication; and her classical moonlight talk with Lorenzo, though very elegant, has nothing to do with the affections, and is more a proof of ready-wit and a good education, than of intellect.

Jessica, the pretty Jewess,—I beg pardon, “Mistress Lorenzo,” the christian,—has her character, such as it is, hit off by a few masterly strokes. Beauty is her best recommendation. I imagine she is small of stature; a little plump, with a delicate hand and foot, and remarkable for a well-turned ancle. Her eye is full and lustrous; there is great richness in her lips, especially when she smiles; she has a profusion of glossy black ringlets; and there is a touch of slyness in addition to her native expression of countenance. To these charms, she possesses, we know, an arch and pleasant style of chatting, well suited to the hours of dalliance. Here she is at home; even more than when she talks with her “merry devil” Launcelot. But when she has to speak as a lady, which she seldom attempts, we perceive a constraint, arising from her former recluse life, and perhaps from a poorness in her ideas, where her inclinations are not her prompters. In order to be married to Lorenzo, Jessica is made a christian; and her love for him, and her new faith, may be poised against her hatred of the “tediousness” of the “hell,” her father’s house. Had she been gifted with

a stronger mind, she would not have forsaken a father, though she could not esteem him ; nor robbed him ; nor betrayed his confidential conversation with Tubal and with Chus to his enemies. Weakness, even in her love, may be observed ; though her love was sufficiently strong to overcome every atom of gratitude to her father. When at Belmont, she speaks of him as of a person in whose company she once happened to be ; the first words, “ When I was with him,” are painfully unfeeling towards those inclined to sympathize for a father whom she has robbed ; but there were none such in the company, because the man was a Jew, and she knew that opinion was in her favour. With one of firmer intellect, even in those days, fashion would not have confounded wrong with right ; but Jessica was born to be cajoled by fashion. She could lose “ fourscore ducats at a sitting,” and exchange a “ turquoise ring” for a monkey, as unconcernedly as she stole them from a Jew, because she could reconcile them all to the fashion of the day.

My notion of Launcelot, as I have seen him, has not been reflected from the stage. “ The patch is kind enough ;” yet he is amazingly wrapped up in self, and his soliloquies are intense on that darling subject. An obtrusive feature in his character, is the conceit in his skull that he is better than he should be. Having been called by one who did not see him “ master” and “ young gentleman,” he insists, over and over again, on his being “ young master Launcelot,” and at last styles himself “ the young gentleman.” All this, like every thing he says, is a mixture of , vanity and drollery,—on the latter he stakes his fame

as a wit. Nature never formed a more egregious coxcomb,—he is Lord Foppington in low life, as far as his imbecility can reach. In the same strain he talks of his “manly spirit,” and of the jew’s having “done him wrong;” as if he and his master were on an equality. No doubt his solace as a servant was, that he must, sooner or later, owing to his intrinsic merit, come to excellent fortune. He spells his fate on his palm; where, though neither coronet nor mastership offers itself to his imagination, there is something of equal value to the young animal,—“eleven widows, and nine maids, is a simple coming-in for one man.” His jokes are generally failures, but, coming from him, they are laughable. When suddenly reproached with his conduct towards the Moorish woman, his answer is,—“It is much that the Moor should be more than reason; but if she be less than an honest woman, she is, indeed, more than I took her for.” This elaborate nonsense, this grasp at a pun without catching it, uttered in confusion, and in eagerness to shuffle out of the accusation, is as natural as it is ridiculous. It gives occasion to Lorenzo’s observing,—“How every fool can play upon a word!” which, together with what follows, may be mistaken for a self-condemnation, made at hazard, on the part of Shakespeare. By no means: the difficulty is to play well upon a word; besides, as Launcelot then and afterwards proves, the poverty of a jest may be enriched in a fool’s mouth, owing to the complacency with which he deals it out; and because there are few things which provoke laughter more than feebleness in a great attempt at a small matter.

XIX. HENRY THE FIFTH. 1599.

XX. MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING. 1600.

XXI. AS YOU LIKE IT. 1600.—For pure comedy, rich in variety, interest, poetry, and a happy view of human life, *As You Like It* is the world's masterpiece. It has been termed a pastoral comedy, but that implies an unreal description of shepherds and shepherdesses; here we have persons of every degree, true to nature as the trees under which they walk and talk. There is a frankness and freedom in the dialogue, belonging equally to the various characters, that seem to partake of the open air in which they breathe. Never is the scene within-doors, except when something discordant is introduced to heighten, as it were, the harmony,—when the usurper banishes Rosalind, and twice more, for a short while, just to give him time to threaten. These changes serve, without disturbing our calmer feelings, to increase our happiness among the pleasant exiles in the forest.

At one time I thought a lioness was out of her sphere in the forest of Arden, notwithstanding the authority of the original novel for her appearance there. But the forest of Arden is a privileged place, once famous for Merlin's magic fountains, Angelica, and the knights of Charlemagne, surrounded by enchantments, according to Boiardo and Ariosto. Shakespeare avoids following the novel in specifying a certain king of France; he mentions no country; and therefore he has a right to bring a lioness into this poetical forest, placed we know not where.

XXII. MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR. 1601.—Here we have Sir John Falstaff again, not exactly himself; Justice Shallow “holds his own” tolerably well; Nym, Bardolph, and Pistol, are not what they were; and Mrs. Quickly, the servant of Dr. Caius, is a new character, and intended for one, not bearing the remotest resemblance to mine hostess in Eastcheap, except that she is an old woman. Something like these transmutations, arising from another cause, is found in Goldoni’s comedies, where Pantalone and the rest of the Carnival personages continue to appear from one comedy to another, always in the same outward form, and under the same names, but distinct in situation and character. These are not defects in the admirable and sprightly *Merry Wives of Windsor*, taken by itself; but the names are disappointments, and afford a lesson against writing “by royal command,” as it is said Shakespeare endured.

This is one of the plays which was, after its first appearance, retouched and enlarged by the author.

XXIII. TROILUS AND CRESSIDA. 1602.—Shakespeare seems to have made choice of this story for the purpose of displaying the military character. He shows us the several species of a soldier; the frivolous and the revolting, the admirable and the amiable. The love scenes, the women, and the comic characters, are sometimes a relief, but generally a furtherance to the main design. In his other plays his fighters are not mere soldiers: they have some cause dear to their bosoms which urges them on; they “have their quarrel just,” or they think they have, or it is a

struggle for power. Here they have no excitement beyond their profession. The affair originated in an oath of gallantry, and is continued as a point of honour. It becomes a by-gone dispute. It is after a seven years' siege. No man appeals to it as he draws his sword. It served well enough for the groundwork of a declaration of war, but it grows weaker as Helen grows older. They fight because they know not how to leave off. No one can be personally interested except Menelaus and Paris, who are like two rival monarchs, with their assembled forces, while the lady is the kingdom, whose gain or loss cannot possibly affect the crowd on either side. They combat in their calling, no matter for the cause, provided they are regularly paid. So then, these ancient heroes, these Greeks and Trojans, are exactly similar to the camp gentlemen of Shakespeare's day! Aye, and of this day too, and of a thousand years hence; for nature and he know not the change of manners. She and he walk hand in hand through all the modifications of fashion, the same that was, and is, and ever shall be, while human pulses beat. In this play he introduces the reader, a silent and invisible spectator, to an officer's mess, where he touches them by turns with his magic wand, his Ithuriel's spear, and every faculty is laid open to its source, whether good or ill. They talk, and he furnishes the argument of the discourse, giving them golden breath. Thersytes and Pandarus stand behind their chairs, significantly pointing at whatever is ridiculous or contemptible: while Shakespeare himself, in his own sweet words, whispers in our ear the loves of the boy Troilus and the false Cressid.

Let us begin with Achilles. We see him here divested of supernatural machinery; he has no communion with "Olympus' hierarchy" as in the *Iliad*—a very mortal—and indeed the least estimable one in the play. However, being "great Thetis' son," he shall have priority. The Greeks call him "the sinew and the forehand of their host," and no one is more sensible of his importance than himself. They cannot proceed without him, while, for his part, he chooses to be the "sleeping lion;" to be sulky and keep his tent. This mood falls in with his haughtiness and indolence, especially as it is against the wishes of his party. Indeed he has one reason for "this his privacy," having sworn not to fight against Troy, for the sake of one of Priam's daughters. This oath, however, with such a man, is liable to be forgotten; so much so, that it requires a letter from Hecuba, and a token from Polyxena, to remind him of it. Nor is his passion for the lady much in his thoughts. He is no Romeo. Patroclus, who knows better than to give him outrageous counsel, says to him,

"Sweet, rouse yourself, and the weak wanton Cupid
Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold,
And, like a dew-drop from the lion's mane,
Be shook to air."

The weak wanton Cupid, for such was his love, can be shaken off at his will; and in fact he does so at the last, when a stronger passion, "like Aaron's serpent, swallows up the rest." His love of fame surpasses his love of woman; but his pride overcomes both; and his revenge, when thoroughly roused, tops them all. Achilles' pride is in the mouth of every character,

while he and his humble servant Patroclus agree to call it by the name of greatness, till they talk themselves into a belief of it. Let Agamemnon and the chiefs approach his tent, and humbly beg him to come forth, to "arm and out:" this is his delight: it is food for his pride; it is another opportunity for an evasive insolent message. In the mean time, he can listen, with greater complacency, to the "scurril jests," and admire the slanderous mimicry of Patroclus, while at this sport,

"The large Achilles, on his press'd bed lolling,
From his deep chest laughs out a loud applause."

One of the finest touches is where, his pride being hurt, he begins to moralize. Then comes Ulysses, and makes this mighty man a mighty puppet, with his "derision med'cinable," playing upon him, and sounding him "from the lowest note to the top of his compass." He is made the jeer of the army, when he fancies himself at his wisest point. Ajax is envious of his illustrious name; Achilles cannot envy any body, since he is confessedly above all; but he hates Hector for being next in fame to himself. That Hector is a dangerous neighbour. He cannot look upon him without fearing that the world may compare them together. He therefore eagerly desires to kill him, and in his "greatness" tells him so to his face. This is never off his mind; and he is angry if any one else presumes to fight with Hector. Even when about to feast him in his tent, he says,

"I'll heat his blood with Greekish wine to-night,
Which with my scimitar I'll cool tomorrow."

At length the dead body of Patroclus is borne to him :—

“ Kingdom'd Achilles in commotion rages,
And batters down himself.”

He is described as “arming, weeping, cursing, vowing vengeance,” and hurries forth in pursuit of Hector, finds him, and is unwilling to run a hazard in his revenge; and certainly Achilles never impresses us with an opinion of his courage. Then, attended by his myrmidons, he finds him alone and unarmed, and cannot “forego this vantage.” No comment is needed here; and if “great Thetis’ son” dragged Hector’s body three times round the walls of Troy, he was precisely the man here delineated.

Compare him with Hector, and the first thing that strikes us is that he would have forgone “this vantage.” True courage, ever allied to generosity, as was Hector’s, would have forbidden him to fight, with malice prepense, against the weaker man, and to conquer by the aid of superior strength, numbers, or weapons; far less to slay an unarmed enemy.

It would be too much, minutely to examine into the various qualities of soldiership here displayed, from the ardent unreflecting Troilus, to the cautious but romantic courage of old Nestor: besides they bear their distinctive badges for all who choose to look.

Added to them, since the sons of Mars are sure to be accompanied by the daughters of Venus, we have approved specimens in Helen and Cressida, and we want no more. Cressida’s picture painted by Ulysses, is well known; and she herself never speaks, not so

much as a line, taken with the context, without betraying her likeness to it. To select one instance, though all are as transparent; her exaggerated complaints at being compelled to leave Troy and Troilus arrive at their genial height when she pathetically mingles a dread of injuring her perfections with her excessive grief, and screams out compliments on herself. "I'll go in and weep," she says, for her tears cannot flow before her uncle,—

"Tear my bright hair, and scratch my praised checks;
Crack my clear voice with sobs, and break my heart
With sounding Troilus. I will not go from Troy."

According to such authorities as we possess, this play has never appeared in a theatre. Malone conjectures it had been played at Court. It was entered at Stationers' Hall in 1602, and first printed in 1609, without the author's consent. From the preface to that edition we gather that the manuscript had been surreptitiously obtained; and we are told,—“it never had been staled on the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar.” Possibly it was not considered suitable for the stage, even by the author himself, after he had completed it. This accounts for its not having been at first included in the folio, edited by Heminge and Condell; it had long before been filched from them, and, not being an acting play, they had forgotten it; at length, when reminded almost too late, they reprinted it for their folio, placing it, as the commentators have observed, awkwardly among the rest of the plays.

The love of Troilus (Cressida has none) is not

enough to interest us on the stage. We there want a deeper pervading passion, a higher excitement. So powerful are the other characters, though without a leading interest, that the love-disappointment of Troilus is but an episode.

Troilus and Cressida, however, is a harvest of ripe fruits, gathered from the wisest observation and experience; a work to be studied for our instruction; containing a thousand themes for profitable meditation, a thousand passages of wonderful poetry.

XXIV. MEASURE FOR MEASURE.—Unless we believe that Shakespeare could write a long dramatic treatise on a subject without intending it; unless, in fact, he knew not what he was about; we ought to regard the fable of *Measure for Measure* as adopted by him for the purpose of canvassing the argument on chastity and incontinence. Possibly others may have viewed it in the same light, though I have been surprised never to meet with the observation. Hazlitt, with all his admiration of the play, thinks the characters are at “cross purposes;” the truth is, they are at cross arguments. Opinion is at variance; one rule cannot suit all; each party speaks for him or herself, from the peerless Isabella down to the habitually vicious; including the austere self-confidence of Angelo, the frailty of Claudio, and the sheer instinct of a Master Froth. Our instruction is derived from the quality of the several speakers. Unsullied chastity, on the threshold of a cloister, is here persuasive in its own cause; and a warmth towards humanity exists in the Duke, together with a governable temperament.

If, however, we pass the line much beyond the Duke and Isabella, we come to the unfeeling executioner, Abhorson, whose morality is shocked at a communion with Pompey; or to Barnadine, who staggers before us in a state of brutish insensibility to his kind, and to himself. Hazlitt calls Barnadine “a fine anti-thesis;” he is so, but not exactly in Hazlitt’s meaning; he is brought before us in violent opposition to an argument, that might be carried to a speculative extreme. Looking around farther, we see how every one’s plea, or sentence of justice, is swayed by a peculiar disposition; and if we want a striking moral to set forth the consequences of heartless libertinism, it is given by the knave Pompey, who has been forced to leave his infamous service, and become an assistant in the prison. “I am as well acquainted here,” he knowingly says, “as I was in our house of profession: one would think it were Mistress Overdone’s own house, for here be many of her old customers. First, here’s young Master Rash,”—and then he enumerates them.

A summing up of the evidence from the whole work belongs to the lawgiver or the casuist; the witnesses on both sides have been heard.

XXV. CYMBELINE.

XXVI. LEAR. 1605.—Tate’s profanation induced me, fifteen years ago, to write a paper in the *Liberal*, on “Shakespeare’s Fools;” as I was aware that the same manager’s hand which might replace Lear’s Fool, must also sweep aside the deformities attached to the

tragedy as it was then represented. Though at present inapplicable, thanks to Mr. Macready, yet I repeat a part of the paper, lest another Tate should arise; and because the character, having long been misunderstood, is consequently liable to fall again into disrepute.

“Now, our joy, though last, not least,” my dearest of all Fools, Lear’s Fool! Ah, what a noble heart, a gentle and a loving one, lies beneath that party-coloured jerkin! Thou hast been cruelly treated. Regan and Goneril could but hang thee, while the unfeeling players did worse; for they tainted thy character, and at last thrust thee from the stage, as one unfit to appear in their worshipful company. Regardless of that warning voice, forbidding them to “speak more than is set down for them,” they have put into thy mouth words so foreign to thy nature,* that they might, with as much propriety, be given to Cardinal Wolsey. But let me take thee, without addition or diminution, from the hands of

* There are three passages, foisted in by the players, and adopted by the printers, which ought to be for ever expunged from the text. They are the following:—The couplet at the end of the first act; the whole of Merlin’s prophecy during the storm, beginning with “This is a brave night,” as the Fool should go out with Lear; and those brutal words, “And I’ll go to bed at noon,” when the old King sinks into sleep. Such contradictions puzzled me for a long time, till looking among the *Annotations*, a profitable task once in a hundred times, I discovered that none of these three passages are in the quarto editions, printed eight years before Shakespeare’s death, but are introduced into the folio one, printed seven years after it. This, together with their absurdity, makes it plain they are not Shakespeare’s.

Shakespeare, and then thou art one of his perfect creations. Look at him ! It may be your eyes see him not as mine do, but he appears to me of a light delicate frame, every feature expressive of sensibility even to pain, with eyes lustrously intelligent, a mouth blandly beautiful, and withal a hectic flush upon his cheek. O that I were a painter ! O that I could describe him as I knew him in my boyhood, when the Fool made me shed tears, while Lear did but terrify me !

“But where’s my Fool ! I have not seen him these two days.

“*Knight.* Since my young lady’s going into France, the Fool hath much pined away.

“*Lear.* No more of that ; I have noted it well.”

I have sometimes speculated on filling an octavo sheet on Shakespeare’s admirable introduction of characters ; but a little reflection showed me that I must write a volume, and that’s a fearful thing. This would rank among his best. We are prepared to see him with his mind full of the fatal “division of the kingdom” and oppressed with “thick-coming fancies ;” and when he appears before us we are convinced of both, though not in an ordinary way. Those who have never read any thing but the French theatre, or the English plays of the last century, would expect to see him upon the scene wiping his eyes with his cloak ; as if the worst sorrows did not frequently vent themselves in jests, and that there are not beings who dare not trust their nature with a serious face when the soul is deeply struck. Besides, his profession

compels him to raillery and seeming jollity. The very excess of merriment is here an evidence of grief; and when he enters throwing his coxcomb at Kent, and instantly follows it up with allusions to the miserable rashness of Lear, we ought to understand him from that moment to the last. Throughout this scene his wit, however varied, still aims at the same point; and in spite of threats, and regardless how his words may be construed by Goneril's creatures, with the eagerness of a filial love he prompts the old King to "resume the shape which he had cast off." "This is not altogether fool, my lord." But, alas! it is too late; and when driven from the scene by Goneril, he turns upon her with an indignation that knows no fear of the "halter" for himself:—

"A fox when one has caught her,
And such a daughter,
Should sure to the slaughter,
If my cap would buy a halter."

That such a character should be distorted by players, printers, and commentators! Observe every word he speaks; his meaning, one would imagine, could not be misinterpreted; and when at length, finding his covert reproaches can avail nothing, he changes his discourse to simple mirth, in order to distract the sorrows of his master. When Lear is in the storm, who is with him? None—not even Kent—

"None but the Fool; who labours to outjest
His heart-struck injuries."

The tremendous agony of Lear's mind would be

too painful, and even deficient in pathos, without this poor faithful servant at his side. It is he that touches our hearts with pity, while Lear fills the imagination to aching. "The explosions of his passion," as Lamb has written in an excellent criticism, "are terrible as a volcano; they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches." Such a scene wanted relief, and Shakespeare, we may rely upon it, gives us the best. But it is acted otherwise,—no, it is Tate that is acted. Let them, if they choose, bring this tragedy on the stage; but, by all means, let us not be without the Fool. I can imagine an actor in this part, with despair in his face, and a tongue for ever struggling with a jest, that should thrill every bosom. What! banish him from the tragedy, when Lear says, "I have one part in my heart that's sorry yet for thee;" and when he so feelingly addresses him with, "Come on, my boy: how dost, my boy? Art cold? I am cold myself." At that pitch of rage, "Off! off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here!" could we but see the Fool throw himself into his master's arms, to stay their fury, looking up in his countenance with eyes that would fain appear as if they wept not, and hear his pathetic entreaty, "Pr'ythee, nuncle, be contented;"—pshaw! these players know nothing of their trade. While Gloster and Kent are planning to procure shelter for the king, whose wits at that time "begin to unsettle," he remains silent in grief; but afterwards, in the farm-house, we find him endeavouring to divert the progress of Lear's madness, as it becomes haunted by the visions of his daughters, and that in the most art-

ful manner, by humouring the wanderings of his reason, and then striving to dazzle him with cheerfulness. At the last, we behold him, when all his efforts are proved unavailing, utterly dumb. "And my poor fool is hanged!"

XXVII. TAMING OF THE SHREW.—At the end of a note in Morgann's *Essay*, he says, "The reader will be pleased to think that I do not reckon into the works of Shakespeare certain absurd productions, which his editors have been so good as to compliment him with. I object, and strenuously too, even to *The Taming of the Shrew*; not that it wants merit, but that it does not bear the peculiar features and stamp of Shakespeare." He does not seem to have been aware, or to have recollected, that this comedy was rewritten, generally line for line, with few additions, from an older play; nor does he regard it in the same light with me, as a comedy bearing the "peculiar features and stamp" of Italy. Shakespeare's mind and language, however, is distinguishable throughout.

Garriek cut down this comedy to an afterpiece. Others have considered the entire plot as too intricate to be entertaining, and approve of the curtailment. The afterpiece, to me, is like the head cut out of a full-length portrait; and my opinion, offered with hesitation, is that it would succeed admirably in its original state. The *Induction* might or might not be retained; perhaps not, as it is now our custom for a farce to follow, not to precede a play. On the other hand, I can venture to assert, without the slightest hesitation, that it cannot succeed until our actors

have learnt that familiar dialogue is not to be spoken with the lengthened and measured cadence of a sermon. This has been greatly to my annoyance in our comedies, and in many portions of our tragedies. English actors seek too labouredly to create an impression, and cannot allow the words to come "trippingly on the tongue." I have heard a gentleman, since the days of Lewis, utter the most rapid thoughts in tedious sequence; a lady has scolded her husband like Medea invoking the awful spirits of another world; and common messages have been delivered as if they were the mandates of fate. Often, for no other reason, scenes have been unmercifully shortened, which, with easy-spoken actors, would not meet with a Polonius exclaiming, "This is too long." This faulty practice is not witnessed on the French, German, or Italian stage; not even on the Russian.

XXVIII. MACBETH. 1606. — There is something more to be observed on the witches than suited my purpose while speaking of them purely as dramatic creations. Metaphysically, not in a perverse cold allegorical sense, they are *evil suggestions*. I do not believe that Shakespeare intended we should regard them otherwise than as supernatural agents; but, in his truth to nature, in his view of an ambitious man, necessarily influenced by superstitious yearnings for the future, he has treated them as allegorical beings, if we choose to regard them as such. Should any one infer that he was thus evincing his superiority to the credulity of the age, I should be apt to deny it, though I cannot conceive it

possible that he had faith in witchcraft. They admit of this interpretation.

Macbeth and Banquo, somewhat in advance of their victorious army, are walking together across the heath, when their conversation is interrupted by evil suggestions. Macbeth is Thane of Glamis; he may soon wear the title of the conquered Thane of Cawdor; and hereafter he may be king; and Banquo may possibly be the progenitor of a line of kings. Such are their suggestions communicated to each other; and immediately a messenger meets them greeting Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor. The chiefs, surprised at this sudden fulfilment of a part of their conversation, are inclined to imagine it was inspired; that they had undergone a "supernatural soliciting." Such evil suggestions strike harmlessly on Banquo; but Macbeth is half disposed to yield to them. In this mood he acquaints his wife with them; and, at her instigation, he "screws his courage to the sticking place." As king he is surrounded by enemies, and becomes a cruel tyrant; when fearful of losing his throne and life, he again has recourse to his evil suggestions for the means of insuring safety. These, aided by fancied conclusions drawn from actual events, or by deluding prophecies of interested and servile flatterers, or by dreams, offer ample protection from danger, though in terms, as usual in such cases, of riddling import, which happen or not to be riddlingly fulfilled.

It is probable that the witches found their place in the pages of historians, from Banquo's having related the strange coincidence attending their conversation

on the heath; an origin sufficiently strong for the vulgar's having pronounced that they were met and hailed with predictions by three witches.

Now, having treated them dramatically and allegorically, I have a few words to say of them theatrically. No one can be more delighted with Dr. Lock's music than myself; yet I think it monstrous to enjoy it at the expense of the scene's solemnity. To see the stage crowded with singing witches is an affront to the understanding as well as the imagination. The tragedy commands that only the *three witches* shall appear, except where Hecate comes in, to conclude the enchantment, attended by three others, who are to join in singing, "Black spirits and white," &c. In a previous scene Shakespeare borrows a song from Middleton, "Come away, come away," &c., which is sung in the air; but who wrote for the theatre that offensive scene at the close of the second act? There we listen to shoals of witches, who draw moral deductions, and boast of their malignity and skill in dancing! Were the scenes of Shakespeare's witches played precisely as they were written, and no more, I have no doubt their effect would not permit us to regret the loss of Dr. Lock's music.

Mrs. Inchbald calls *Macbeth*, in its contaminated state, a "grand tragic opera." True; and it reminds us of the old epigram:—

"An opera, like a pillory, may be said
To nail the ears down, and expose the head."

XXIX. TIMON OF ATHENS.

, XXX. JULIUS CÆSAR.

XXXI. ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

XXXII. CORIOLANUS.—To a criticism on this tragedy Hazlitt has attached a political argument to prove that our Shakespeare “had a leaning to the arbitrary side of the question.” I am not inclined, at the close of my volume, to enter into a lengthened difference in opinion with him, mixing together politics and poetry; though I see no difficulty in proving, from direct portions, and from the general hue of Shakespeare’s works, that his contempt for a mob, in which we must all join, is a trifle compared to his earnest inculcation of the doctrine that knowledge is power; and certainly he was the first poet who unceremoniously placed royalty on a level with humanity, and openly exclaimed against every species of corruption. His works are indeed fruitful, especially the later ones, in speculative discussions on government and political economy; but a consideration of them would be better suited to a separate paper, and probably better in other hands than mine. Hazlitt’s opinion would have been applicable to Ben Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher.

XXXIII. THE TEMPEST.—We can well imagine that Shakespeare wrote this play after having long endured the accusation of inability to create an original fable, and to obey the law of the three unities. Free of all consideration for the stage, which, as respects every one of his works, is of very inferior importance, *The Tempest* ranks among the noblest of his

productions. Could efficient performers be procured, I entertain no doubt of its dramatic interest for representation ; wanting them, pageantry and Dryden's irrelevant scenes have been thoughtlessly entailed on it.

On this play it was long since my intention to offer a separate pamphlet, wherein an attempt would be made to include the variety of subjects which here solicit attention, the numerous characters, their conduct towards each other, and the conduct of the whole. This essay, conceived and begun, would prove of too disproportionate a length in this place ; nor could it be satisfactory to others, or just towards myself, to give a portion of that which, from its nature, ought to be intimately connected together.

XXXIV. OTHELLO.—Roderigo is a young Venetian nobleman, well educated, perfect in his manners as a gentleman, and regarded with respect by all except Iago ; yet, beneath these outward advantages, there rages a passion too strong to be ruled by his reason, which is, though not observable in his demeanour, below the common standard. Iago alone has descried his weakness, calls him a “ fool,” a “ snipe,” and boasts of making him his purse ; while, at the same time, he sees the necessity of labouring with as much art in the swaying and management of him, as with any other character in the play, Othello himself excepted. I have never seen Roderigo on the stage ; but, in his stead, an empty buffoon, on whom Iago would not have wasted an argument. He may be differently represented now ; for I used to see him in

those days when Othello was a Blackamoor, and attired, in defiance of "his baptism," which is mentioned, like his country's enemy, "a turbann'd Turk." Our historical painters, in their love of colour, followed the authority of the theatre.

XXXV. HENRY THE EIGHTH. 1613.—If anything could tempt my approval of an addition to the text, it would be Handel's *Angels ever bright and fair* in the chamber of the dying queen. Still I must object to even this disobedience of Shakespeare's orders for *sad and solemn Music*; which should be played on the stage, or behind the scenes. The actual dream may be better left to the imagination; but the illusion is injured by the orchestral operations, though not so much as by a young lady standing up to sing before the audience with a music-book in her hand. This last is not to be endured; yet of what use is it to speak of propriety, when our old respectable Griffith is banished from the scene, and Cromwell appears to play his part? Is it decorous to permit young Cromwell to show himself at home in the queen's chamber, and among her maidens? Is it in his character, dramatically or historically, to attend on disgraced royalty? There is a shameless reason for this, in the difficulty of finding two good actors, who would consent to play only one, or only the other. Could I embody Hamlet in excellence equal to the text, I would gladly be either Griffith or Cromwell; nay, my pride would be gratified in making a short part effective; and policy should teach me the value of such conduct towards the public. First-rate actors

lose much by their unwillingness to be seen in Shakespeare's second and third-rate characters; they are persons little aware of their own interest. Vanity never looks at what mischief may be lurking behind its own mirror.

XXXVI. TWELFTH NIGHT.—Some of these last plays baffle my means of conjecture for placing them in order. All the chronologists agree in making *Twelfth Night* the last, though on no efficient ground.

It seems Shakespeare was indebted to two other tales, besides that of Bandello, for some hints in portions of this fable. No reading, connected with Shakespeare, has been so unprofitable to me as the examination into authorities, which might have biassed or actually influenced his mind in the creation of fables, characters, or sentiments. After having again read Bandello's tale attentively, I find nothing like the story; but there are a twin brother and sister, the latter being disguised as a lad, and serving her lover in the quality of page, though under entirely different circumstances. The real situation of Sebastian and Viola we must endeavour to trace in other tales. Something of Viola may be seen in Bandello's Nicuola; that is, her devotion to her lover; in other respects they are widely distinct. As to a sentence that might have given rise, however remotely, to a sentiment in the play, I find not one; but there is half a one, which, literally translated, is this, spoken by the disguised Nicuola to her master:—"because I have often heard say, that girls in their first loves,

love much more tenderly, and with greater warmth, than do the men."

In looking into any other of the Italian "*novellieri*," or English novellists, who have had the honour of furnishing him with fables, I meet with nothing beyond the materials, for the most part shapeless, and of no more importance, than the materials of a temple are in our estimation of an architect's skill. Milton was less original in his *Paradise Lost* than was Shakespeare in his works; and assuredly Milton's *Comus* stands more indebted to Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*, than any of Shakespeare's plays to a previous one, or to any novel, with the exception of those which he rewrote, adding little to them.

No one has remarked that Shakespeare invariably placed his scene away from his own times. The nearest approach to English manners of his day, is in *Henry the Eighth*. Was he aware, that the more general his view of humanity, unrestricted by time or place, the more indelible must be his fame? A supposition has crossed my mind, that, had he lived to prepare his works for publication, he would have annulled every allusion to the fleeting manners and customs of his day. Having served his purpose for a while on the stage, I think it probable they would have afterwards been erased. As they now stand, they are unconnected with a single incident, or with the spirit or the feeling of the dialogue.

Judging from the greater number of his critics, we must believe that he wrote nothing studiously and reflectively. On the contrary, turn to what drama I may, there seems to me as much premeditated art and intention in the contrivance, as there are poetry, knowledge, and wisdom, in the execution. In spite of the common, reckless view of him, the three last qualities are readily acknowledged; why not the two first? Possibly our unwillingness to give him credit for them, has its source in our not yet being convinced that his dramatic school is so difficult as what is termed the classical. Yet in that which is esteemed more difficult, there have been several masters equally good; while those who have attempted to follow his apparently free and easy rules, whether among his contemporaries, or in later times, have signally failed. Beaumont and Fletcher are, perhaps, the next to him. Without bringing their dramatic characters and poetry in competition with his, the developement of their fables, the construction of their scenes, and the final management of the whole, are bald, disjointed, and disappointing. The English school, for it was not Shakespeare's, seems to offer less encouragement to imitators than any other; may it not be because its art bears a greater resemblance to nature? A master-work of art, representing nature in any form, is achieved with a difficulty proportionate to the freedom and facility which it displays.

This volume, among other deficiencies, stands in need of a chapter on Shakespeare's faults as a dramatic poet. To play the critic on so great an author

is a dangerous office; and the bad success of others before me is alarming. In attempting to call attention to a fancied defect in him, we might expose our own want of knowledge. My safeguard, which affords me unalloyed pleasure, is admiration.

FINIS.

Preparing for the Press,

SHAKESPEARE'S POEMS,

EDITED BY

THE AUTHOR OF THIS VOLUME.

ERRATA.

- Page 97, line 16, for "struggles and love," read *struggles of jealousy and love*.
— 178, line 9, for "direct cruelty" read *direct cruelty*.
— 194, line 13, for "no one," read *some one*.

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